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Cover picture

"Untitled", 1981, by Antony Gormley is one of the drawings on exhibition in his one-man show at the Victoria Miro Gallery, 21 Cork Street, London W1 until March 14.

Ideal coitions

Galen Strawson

ROGER SCRUTON

Sexual Desire

428pp, Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £18.95

(paperback, £8.95).

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The acts and emotions of sex and love seem to avoid language. They are very hard to describe - the success rate is not high. But the difficulties only increase when one tries to go beyond mere description into explicit theory. For then to the difficulties of particular description are added the difficulties of saying anything that is quite generally true.

There are perhaps two main reasons why this is so hard. It is not just that we differ deeply among ourselves in matters of sex and love. We also differ deeply within ourselves. Most of us are profoundly ambivalent (not to say inconsistent) about these things. Sometimes it seems that the only way to escape this ambivalence is to close the mind; and this is quite a popular option. But it is never a very satisfactory thing to do, and it doesn't work very well in the present case.

The ambivalence shows up in any good collection of aphorisms. Sometimes we agree with Tasso: "Love is the affection of a mind that has nothing better to engage it." Sometimes we agree with Theophrastus: "Any time that is not spent on love is wasted." Sometimes we half agree with both - uncertain in any case about whether we or they mean the same thing by "love". Sometimes we reflect on our reflections and agree with Chamfort: "In love, everything is true, everything is false; and it is the one subject on which one cannot express an absurdity."

Roger Scruton has written a very large and rather florid book called *Sexual Desire*. It seems to prove Chamfort wrong. At the same time, it makes one see just what he meant. It has many serious faults, but it is undeniably impressive in scale, and is likely to prove unignorable - by those who want to philosophize about sex in a professional manner. Most non-philosophers will probably find it unreadable. And so may many philosophers. Perhaps it will go down best with the readership wittily envisaged in Weidenfeld and Nicolson's spring catalogue, where it is particularly recommended to "vicars, labour councillors, child-minders, dog-walkers and other doctors of the soul". Overall, *Sexual Desire* is a bit of a shambles -

a highly ambitious but unfinished intellectual complex in which nearly all the missing bits are somewhere to hand and some of the essential services are laid on (including the electricity - and the gas), but in which half the major constructions are lacking something: a wing, a staircase, a front door - or a ground floor. Definitions begin, subdivide, break off, and restart; they gear up nicely and then just wander away. The use of key words like "rational" and "moral" is ruinously vague (Aristotle, Kant and Hegel all have a broth-spoiling hand in this). Scruton's well-known brand of strangely self-righteous intellectual irresponsibility is everywhere in evidence (somehow he manages to be both cheeky and stuffy). The book is full of provocative exaggerations (the erotic "is fundamental to a full understanding of what it is for persons to be 'ends in themselves'" in the Kantian sense), plain falsehoods ("sexual desire is a necessary condition of personality"), truths that are truths only by virtue of bending the ordinary meaning of words ("sexual arousal can occur only between persons") and major and minor rhetorical abuses, of which I will give one extended example, chosen partly because it places such a curious emphasis on the notions of dominance and submission.

Yeats lamented that "love has pitched his mansion / In the house [sic] of excrement". But his regret is incoherent. For love could not (phenomenologically speaking) have chosen a better residence. The sexual parts possess a vital and regularly exercised function (excretion), which we can control, but which lies importantly beyond the reach of our intentions.

Several obvious queries arise immediately. They are worth noting because they are typical of doubts that arise on every page of *Sexual Desire*.

1. "House" should be "place". And is "lament" really the right word? Or "regret"? Did Yeats - or Crazy Jane - really find this "tragic"? ("Fair and foul are near of kind / And fair needs foul", I cried.)
2. Is the alleged regret really "incoherent"? This is a very strong word. Sexual organs could have been very different, and so could sexual intercourse, as writers of science fiction are well aware (eg, Ursula LeGuin in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, or James Tiptree Jr, in *Up the Walls of the World*). Here as elsewhere Scruton builds illegitimately on a special feature of the human case to produce a generalization that appears to lay claim to immutable and intergalactic validity. In so doing he seems to show the sort of lack of imagination that he is prone to accuse others of.

3. The reference of "sexual parts" is perhaps intended to be vague. But if it is not intended to be vague, then this view (as roughly half the human race will be quick to point out) depends heavily on treating the anus as a sexual part (given that the female urethra is not a plausible candidate). This is fine for some, but not for all - and there is a clear sense in which the extent to which one treats the anus as a sexual part depends on the extent to which one's experience has led one to think of it as such.

To continue (Scruton's emphases are in italics, mine in small capitals): I come to see my sexual parts as overcomng me, in obedience to the natural rhythm of my body... They are therefore a symbol of the body's eventual triumph over the will: of its infinite capacity to "have the last word" in all our alimentary transactions... Excretion is the final "no" to all our transcendental illusions - to the *carli inganni* of the poet who imagines with Leopardi, that "ad stesso" is something other than "fango", something other than mud or slime...

When I urinate, my life and activity are for a moment interrupted... I allow the body to "have its way", conscious that I cannot long resist the imperative... Hence, I come to see my sexual organ as the conduit of the body's excretions, the instrument of its rule. Whatever happens to me through it, expresses the body's command. Excretion has a daily task of summing me, and hence the organs of excretion acquire the nimbus of authority which is the body's ultimate due. Inevitably, therefore, they transform sexual excitement into a bodily imperative. The very fact that they are calling to me reminds me that, in this present arousal, I am overcome by my body. Nor can I regret the fact, for I am my body, and nothing more vividly reminds me of this than the organs through which the body expresses its lordship... SOVEREIGNTY... AUTOCRACY... DOMINION.

The language of this passage is not good; its thesis is quite unconvincing. The intrinsic character of the (essentially psychophysical) feeling of sexual desire provides an entirely sufficient explanation of why it can be experienced as a "bodily imperative". The argument from excrement - in which Scruton later includes menstruation - is as unnecessary as it is dubious. (What in any case is the status of the claim? Is it a claim about an unconscious association? Few people make it consciously.) Here as elsewhere it looks as if Scruton is projecting his own particular psychosexual profile on to the rest of the human race. It looks as if he is confusing theory with autobiography (as he seems to when he refers to the "ritillations that occur in the bath", as if these were a familiar part of the everyday life of all sexually active bath-takers).

This confusion is extremely natural. It constitutes a major danger for anyone who tries to theorize about sex and love. Quirks of cathexis that are profoundly determinative of one's own outlook have a feeling of fundamentality about them. They encourage the assumption that they must be fundamental for everyone. Personal proclivities put themselves over as universal truths; they give rise to a deep and deeply deceptive sense of certainty, a sense that one can just tell from one's own experience that the way one feels about things is universally shared. They prompt a seductive illusion of total empathetic grasp. Such things easily override the obstreperously contrary thought that other people's experiences may be quite profoundly different from one's own, in ways that one may not be able to imagine very well - a thought particularly disagreeable to anyone enamoured of grand theory and lordly generalization.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to dismiss *Sexual Desire* on the basis of passages like the one quoted above. There are many of them, but it is not always fair to lift them out of context. And although *Sexual Desire* is a difficult, excessive and very wearisome book to read, it has to be said that it is also an interesting and highly serious piece of work. Perhaps it is not particularly original in any of its main contentions, but originality is by no means always a virtue. Its main value is likely to be as a focus for criticism, but it is on occasion both subtle and sensitive: on the smile, the blush, the glance, the caress, for example (though even here there are many grounds for disagreement); or on "word-shame" - the near universal human tendency to succumb to circumlocution when talking about sex.

It is also very insensitive about many things. Scruton is (as far as I can see) remarkably wrong about jealousy, embarrassment and friendship. It is just not true that arousal is always "a response to the other, as a self-conscious agent, who is alert to me" (leaving aside narcissists and necrophiliacs, one can be aroused by the sight of someone asleep, or awake but completely unaware of one). Scruton is feeble on lesbianism and weak on women's experience generally, and his efforts to pre-empt feminist objections at the level of argument have not carried over to his tone, emphasis and choice of example, which remain very "male" - where "male" denotes a certain traditional style of sexual outlook rather than a biological category.

His objections to psychoanalysis are arid.

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His brief sketch of a general moral theory is a disaster. There are some serious omissions. He has taken virtually no account of the possible objections of anthropologists, or of historians who have suggested that the modern Western sense of self, which Scruton holds to be a necessary condition of sexual desire, may be of relatively recent origin. He never discusses infatuation, or the distinction that might be made between mere infatuation and genuine erotic love. (Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris* might have helped here.) Nor, more importantly, does he distinguish the case in which love develops out of sexual desire from the (probably more rewarding) case in which sexual desire develops out of prior love or attraction that is, initially, predominantly non-sexual in character. He thinks only of the former. (Stendhal, whose *De l'amour* hardly gets a mention, may be a bad influence.)

But he is also interesting – on many things: on nakedness, tenderness, abandon, intimacy, orgasm, arousal; on "Don Juanism", "Tristanism", narcissism, "Kinseyism"; on sociology, "gender identity", perversion, shame, and "Platonic love". However wrong he is, however lush and bossy, he is interesting. And through the heavy swell of sub-Sartrean phenomenology there swims the silvery sprat of Scrutonian good sense. It is a lively fish. It must be, because it has to spend most of its time avoiding the loopy nets of Scruton's political metaphysics, and it has not yet been finally caught (it keeps on slipping out through one hole or another).

His fundamental thesis about sexual desire is not easy to summarize, and this is largely because when he appears to be talking about what sexual desire and love are actually like, he is as often as not talking about his ideal, about what he thinks they ought to be like – about how they are when things go best. This creates many confusions. Indeed the principal theoretical defect of *Sexual Desire* lies in Scruton's failure adequately to distinguish three things:

- (1) the project of saying what sexual desire and love are actually like;
- (2) the project of saying in non-moral terms what they are like when things go best;
- (3) the project of discussing any moral issues that are raised specifically by sex and love.

These things are of course connected, but they are distinct. Scruton runs them all together in a thick theoretical blur, eager to scold and above all to edify.

The blur is perhaps not entirely unmoivated: Scruton sometimes seems tempted by the thesis that the best case of sexual desire is the only real or true case there is (so that (1) amounts to (2)), and, equally, by the thesis that anything less than the best is likely to involve some sort of moral failure, some kind of perversion, obscenity or turpitudinous lack of respect for the dignity of persons (so that (2) is not distinct from (3)). But both these theses are false, and the blur is just a blur.

Scruton argues that the idea that our sexual relations reveal what is most "animal" about us (where "animal" is opposed to "human") is really the reverse of the truth. The sexual congress of animals has a singularly casual and thoughtless character. Human sexual intercourse is profoundly different because it is essentially "mediated by, and expressive of, a conception of itself". Human sexual desire is essentially informed by "interpersonal intentionality" or thought-directedness. When I desire you, I think of you as a person, as a subject of experience with a self-conscious perspective on the world, as a fully self-responsible individual, a free and moral agent, an embodied "I", a self; and it is as such that I desire you. (Otherwise I am some kind of pervers.)

I desire you. And, with luck, your thoughts and feelings reciprocate mine. (Scruton has little to say about unrequited love.) We are mentally intertwined in a special way (Dante, Hegel, Sartre and Thomas Nagel are among previous exponents of this familiar theme). We are excited, and we are excited "precisely by a cooperative enterprise". For you are conscious of my consciousness of what is going on, and I am conscious of your consciousness of my consciousness of what is going on – and so on. Each of us is aware of, and desires, the other, and each of us is aware of (and no doubt desires) the awareness and desire of the other. (It is a commonplace that many people are aroused principally by the thought that the other person

is aroused by them.) There is great exposure and therefore great intimacy in this state of mutual awareness (and there is a sense in which it can be true of you and me that we are in this state although we have never actually thought about ourselves in these terms).

So human sexual desire is epistemically complex; it is suffused with thought. In the case of sex, as in the case of many other things, pleasure depends essentially on belief. Suppose you are eating a steak, and find it delicious – until you are told it is horsemeat. Suppose you are electrified by the touch of the person you love – until you find that it is someone else who is touching you. In both cases your pleasure in the sensation ceases; but the basic sensation has not changed at all; only your beliefs about it have.

Interpersonal intentionality is crucial, but it isn't everything: there is (of course) an important respect in which sexual desire is focused particularly on the body. But it focuses on the body only *qua* the physical embodiment of the person; it is the person that is desired. (The face, crucial in desire, is part of the body.) It's you I want, and you are not just your body. So my desire is "non-transferable"; it will not for example transfer to someone else who has a very similar body (here it is a pity Scruton does not consider Bernard Williams's intriguing discussion of what might happen if a number of copies of the person you loved were produced). Desire is not just lust or urge or appetite or a need for what Scruton calls "curious pleasure" (here one misses any comment on the role played by alcohol in much – perhaps most – sexual activity in the West). It is aimed at a particular person – it is essentially constituted by "individualizing intentionality". And it finds its highest fulfilment in *erotic love* – in the experience of union with another person that can, despite Plato's doubts, somehow or other be achieved precisely by means of, and in the midst of, and not at all in spite of, sexual intercourse.

Any falling off from full interpersonal intentionality is a falling off in the direction of perversion and "obscene perception". And interpersonal intentionality provides the main criterion of sexual perversity (here Scruton's views are close to Thomas Nagel's in his article "Sexual Perversity"). Bestiality and necrophilia are clearly perverse because they detach the sexual urge from full interpersonal intentionality. The same goes for paedophilia, to the extent that children are not yet fully persons: to this extent (and only to this extent) it is sexually perverse. But it is also highly likely to be wrong on other moral grounds.

Homosexuality is not a perversion, because it can obviously involve full interpersonal intentionality. But Scruton is clearly not happy about this; he suggests cautiously that there may be some "fault" in homosexuality because there is a need for "complementarity", "strangeness" and "a sense of risk" in sexual relations that is usually to be found only in relations with the sexually mysterious other sex. Others find strangeness and risk elsewhere, of course – they don't think it depends on differently shaped sexual organs. Nor is it obvious that the strangeness of difference is superior to the familiarity of similarity.

Sado-masochism is a "relatively normal part of the canon of sexual possibilities", although it can be perverted – it all depends on the degree to which interpersonal intentionality is sustained. Incest, too, is not necessarily perverted: it is almost always wrong on moral grounds (especially when intergenerational), but it is not necessarily *sexually* perverse, because it can involve full interpersonal intentionality. Fellatio and cunnilingus are unexceptionable (and have "immense symbolic significance"). Masturbation is not perverted so long as it is what one might call *faute de mieux* masturbation, performed by someone who would rather have the real thing. It becomes perverted – so Scruton rules – only when it becomes a means of obtaining sexual gratification while avoiding interpersonal intentionality and "the dangers and difficulties that surround the human encounter".

On the face of it, it looks as if Scruton has to say that rape is not a sexual perversion. But Sara Ann Keetchum has pointed out when criticizing Nagel (in *The Philosophy of Sex*, edited by Alan Sobie, 1980), rape can involve all the complex reciprocity of full interpersonal intentionality.

Intentionality: "The rapist desires to rape and humiliate the rapee; the rapee perceives his intention and is aroused to fear by it; the rapist perceives the fear and is further excited and aroused in his intention; the rapee perceives this further excitement and becomes more afraid, and so on." The trouble is that one can treat someone as a person while not treating her (or him) well. In fact there are ways of treating people badly that presuppose that they are persons. Still, Scruton can perfectly well claim that rape is not sexually perverted; he can condemn it morally on other grounds.

He is, furthermore, fully entitled to his ideal of sexual intercourse and erotic love. But he is far too quick to suggest that people who fall short of his ideal, and whose interpersonal intentionality is not always up to the mark, are failing both sexually and morally. The first claim is simply a mistake. The second is particularly characteristic of sexual Scrutonianism.

Sexual Scrutonianism has its merits. In particular, it energetically repudiates Plato's view that "desire can have no place in love, since it is a physical urge, belonging to our baser nature". It incorporates a strong and in intention admirable defence of the claim that erotic love is indeed a genuine possibility – that the highest and deepest forms of love can find full expression in sexual passion. (Scruton seems to hold that love is a possibility experientially speaking even though it is, ultimately, "a great metaphysical illusion", founded on two other illusions, the illusion of the persisting "I" and the illusion of metaphysical freedom of will.) But, having rejected Plato's division between sex and love, Scruton introduces an equally unattractive dichotomy of his own: on the one hand there is that relatively rare thing, genuinely Scrutonian, uninterrupted interpersonally intentional sex; on the other hand there is non-Scrutonian sex – a vast realm of greater or lesser obscenity, perversity and general moral failure. There is no in-between.

Scruton might object that this shows a misunderstanding. For at one point he argues that nothing is obscene in itself; there is only obscene perception of things – perception which characteristically "focuses on the flesh as flesh", and "enjoy[s] the thought of its autonomous operation". "Obscenity", he says, "attaches, not to the things themselves, but to a way of seeing or representing them." But then he shifts his ground. He starts to talk about things that are "proper objects of obscene perception: not to perceive these things as obscene is to misperceive them". And so in effect he reinstates the word "obscene" as a way of classifying things, rather than just perceptions of things (asserting, for example, that all masturbation is obscene, although it is not always perverted).

He then goes on to claim that obscenity is just like perversity, in so far as it "standardly involves the attempt to divorce the sexual act from its interpersonal intentionality", in focusing on the flesh as flesh, and so on. Accordingly, he holds that people can be obscene in their sexual behaviour, just as they can be perverse. And when they are, guess what happens: "the body rises up and inundates [their] perception, and in this nightmare the spirit goes under, as it goes under in death".

Suppose we grant Scruton his use of the term "obscene". We may then want to say that sex divides into (at least) three parts: there is optimal Scrutonian sex, obscene and perverted sex, and a great deal more sex besides. But this is not how Scruton sees it. For now his black-and-white rhetorical instincts rise up, and his good sense goes under, as it goes under in his polemical journalism. He forgets about the facts; he forgets about how different people are from one another. He partitions the sexual realm into good and bad; and vast areas of innocent uncertainty, failure, imperfection, abnormality, honesty, embarrassment and "animality" are condemned as more or less immoral, obscene, or perverted. His principal error is perhaps simply this: he seems to be unaware that some of the most intense reciprocities of erotic love are essentially mediated by an attitude that he condemns as obscene.

The problem is not just that his lavish condemnations are morally unattractive; the more serious objection is that they involve a mistake: that he has not mastered the amazing data, a failure of research. He has not got to the heart of the matter. He overintellectualizes and

overintentionalizes. He is too narrow. He pays no attention to the special intensities of the young, the inexperienced, the artless, the shy, the insecure, the clumsy, the timid, the wise to the mutual messages of arousal, those whose desires are strong but who are too uncertain of themselves, or too modest, to have any deep confidence that they are really enjoying similar feelings in their partners. His musically muscular lovers are so comfortably busy. Highly practised, intellectually aware, they resemble at times the body-conscious tuosos of the "sex manuals" that he despises. They are always seeking and struggling, conquering and engineering. They are too competent, too strenuous, too knowing. (Perhaps they are rather "male".) "In the full ardour of desire," he says, "each participant is striving to be present in his body..." But many cases that they just are present in their bodies, in the case. They do not have to strive at all.

Nor do they spend their time pursuing a strategy which seeks to summon the perspective of the other into the surface of his flesh. They find that there is less design and more thoughtfulness: intensity and reflex response are often – things do not go well. But many would agree that when things go best there is a way in which they are effortless. No doubt the complexities of mutual awareness persist in some sense – but in a stilled manner. Strategy is in abandon; the extraordinary range of its security that play such a large part in our people's sexual lives, and which Scruton fails to mention, are (at least temporarily) undone. There is a point at which unequal power relations disappear because there is a type of intimacy that annihilates them. There is here a difficult task of description to be undertaken, one that Scruton does not acknowledge.

As already remarked, Scruton is fully entitled to his ideal. But when the idealization of sex is essentially bound up with the vilification of Z for failing to be or falling short of X, there is something different. Polemical idealization always carries certain risks, and Scruton runs them in the present case: the risk of intolerance; the risk of slipping into a quite genuine anti-pluralistic authoritarianism (something that Scruton would be happy to admit to, since pluralism stinks of liberalism, which stinks of the risk of moral arrogance or moral superiority; connectedly, the risk of a certain kind of theoretical blindness, one that stems from overconcentration on an ideal, and produces insensitivity to the apparently almost unlimited diversity and plasticity of the human condition).

Sexual Desire is damaged by all these things. In spite of its animated, grandiloquent and sometimes very careful complexity. This is the result of Scruton's moral and political ideals struggling to reduce a reality that is far more round than it is. It is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the last chapter of the book, which is called "The Politics of Sex" and which anticipates his next book. Scruton hopes for a "restoration of the sacred"; he wants, reasonably enough, to defend the "traditional decencies" in some form, and he thinks he has some new arguments – arguments from sex. Thus, remarkably, he claims "that the objective conditions for marriage creates... the objective conditions for the genesis of desire". Even more remarkably, he thinks that sexual "integrity" – which he defines as "the ability to be in your body, in the very moment of desire" – "will flourish in a society in which religious institutions and customs also flourish and retain their authority". That is, he thinks that flourishing religious institutions are a sufficient condition for flourishing sexual integrity.

One thinks and one wonders. One thinks of those passionately Pauline early Christians, communities, of St Augustine and of contemporary Islamic fundamentalism, of the history of Christianity and Islam, and of how much they have done for "sexual integrity", and for the balanced acknowledgment of one's essential corporeality and sensuality, and for "the ability to be in one's body in the very moment of desire". And then one thinks that it is wonderful what a theory can do to a person, especially when the theory is a theory of "human flourishing", and the fact is a fact about sex. It is a curious spectacle – Procrustes' attempt to have his way with Proteus in the bed.

The end of Europe, and beyond

George Steiner

PAUL MICHAEL LÜTZELER
Hermann Broch: Eine Biographie
415pp. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp. DM48.
351803572X

It is unlikely that the Hermann Broch centennial will occasion a more thorough and scrupulous tribute than that implicit in Paul Michael Lützeler's biography. If Professor Lützeler's approach is old-fashioned and often ponderous – when Broch attends this or that social or literary gathering, lists of names cascade; when he travels or vacations, we are given a Baedeker of hotels and spas – it is also informed by a caring fairness and authority. Discretion leaves some areas of Broch's tormented private life in shadow; but the essential portrait, as Lützeler's research and narrative have established it, will stand. We now have clear access to the historical and personal context of one of the subtlest, most representative literary achievements of the age.

The family background, with its Central European and Viennese roots, its almost unworried movement out of Judaism and its wealth, made Hermann Broch one of a characteristic galaxy (it included such figures as Hofmannsthal and Wittgenstein). The familial conflicts – Broch's father was insistent that his son should enter the family textile business, and was obstructive to Hermann's evident leanings towards philosophy and aesthetics – took on those almost ritual guises which Freud was setting out as archetypal. Broch's adolescence and young manhood, his discoveries of eros and his first marriage (Lützeler clarifies the complicated and sometimes comical train of events) were wholly illustrative of the inter-

play between ease and enervation, between tolerant liberality and darker intimations, which defines the twilight close of the Austro-Hungarian world.

The singularity of Hermann Broch's career lies in its postponement. Strongly drawn to mathematics (he was a fully qualified textile engineer), hoping to make a contribution to the philosophy of the exact sciences as it was developing around Helmholtz, Mach and the Vienna Circle, Broch came late to literature. It was only in his forty-fourth year, in 1928-9, that Broch found what was to be his chosen form: that of speculative fiction, of imaginative narrative used to explore essentially epistemological issues. As Lützeler hints, Broch's entrance into psychoanalytic treatment (the first analysis was to extend from 1927 to 1935) may have been a liberating and compelling factor.

But even if one allows for the long process of inward rehearsal and for the imperatives of self-recognition which led Broch to break with his industrial-commercial career, the sheer mastery, the technical originality, the assured spaciousness of Broch's first full-scale fiction, remain breathtaking. *The Sleepwalkers*, in its three voluminous, precisely interwoven parts, is one of the major novels of the twentieth century. It stands beside Musil's *The Man Without Qualities* (the analogies and contrasts between Broch and Musil were constant and crucial not only to both men but, as the most recent instalment of Canetti's autobiography shows, to the general history of European letters) as the most penetrative, radically imagined analysis we have of the end of classical Europe, of the collapse of humane values and styles of life, during and after the First World War. Although it is not the most experimental of Broch's major works, *The Sleepwalkers* may well be the most convincing.

Kafka's problems

S. S. Prawer

ITCHIE ROBERTSON
Kafka: Judaism, politics and literature
36pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press. £27.50.
0191818300

Itchle Robertson's *Kafka: Judaism, politics and literature* combats two opposing beliefs about Kafka's writings: that they are written in a code to which a key must be found so that the reader can unravel their message; and that they constitute a set of insoluble riddles about which nothing further can, or ought to be, said. It therefore focuses on some of Kafka's known concerns – his attempts to come to terms with Judaism and Jewishness, his socio-political sympathies and antipathies, and his passionate engagement with a discernible body of literary and religious works – in order to show, convincingly, how all of these can be made to illuminate his developing art without translating it into terms other than his own. Robertson succeeds in throwing light on many aspects of Kafka's writings by examining the nature and extent of his studies of Jewish languages, history, literature and religion; by re-examining and re-interpreting Kafka's difficult aphorisms; and by scrutinizing the use he made of the books he is known to have read, in the light of the maxim that "in cases of influence, the active partner is not the one who exerts the influence, but the one on whom the influence is exerted". He also has much that is pertinent to say about general expectations in Kafka's day and how his writings fulfilled or deliberately thwarted them. Above all, he demonstrates again and again how much may be gained by going beyond Max Brod's redactions of Kafka's writings to the authoritative text that is now being established, and makes one regret that Brod's legacies have so far thwarted all efforts to allow the manuscripts of *The Trial* to be used in the exemplary way in which Sir Malcolm Paisley used those of *The Castle* in his critical edition.

Even an interpreter who shows such sober good sense as Robertson cannot always avoid the perennial temptations of Kafka criticism. One of these is the kind of overinterpretation which discerns a necessary reference to Goethe when Kafka uses a commonplace idiomatic phrase like "wie eine Raute". Another is the

conflation of the view of one character in a story with that of author or reader. "Extreme suffering, then, does give a meaning to death and leads to an understanding that is perhaps attainable by no other means" – that may be the opinion of the officer in *In the Penal Colony*, but it is one we need share as we watch the officer preparing to inflict hideous torture with his infernal machine? Roy Pascal's *Kafka's Narrators*, to which Robertson is less than generous, in fact offers a salutary antidote to the reading of *In the Penal Colony* put forward in this book. We also find, occasionally, the kind of allpige which begins by speaking of "a cluster of unequivocal allusions to Judaism" and then goes on to detail a number of points which are anything but "unequivocal": "suggests the Torah"; "may have a source in the Cabala...". Indeed, if Kafka's relation to Judaism is as central to his fiction as Robertson claims, why do the German equivalents of "Jew", "Jewish" or "Judaism" never occur in any quotation from the novels and stories adduced in this book? The answer may, perhaps, be sought in the parabolic nature of Kafka's art: but I am sure I am not the only reader who would have liked to see this question specifically asked and answered.

There can be no doubt, however, that Robertson's careful readings of Kafka, guided by the sound principle that for this author "writing was a way of objectifying problems, gaining detachment from them, and seeing them in perspective", are an important addition to a line of British scholarship, from Edwin Muir to Pascal, Richard Sheppard and Paisley, which has helped to make Kafka a powerful presence in the English-speaking world while also correcting some of the excesses of Continental and American exegesis. The book sets Kafka firmly into the literary and cultural context of his time and place, using a gratifyingly wide variety of pertinent literary, historical, political, philosophical and religious texts with scholarly acumen, tact and flair. It not only enhances our understanding of Kafka's art, but also increases our respect for his determined grappling with such ultimate problems as the disjunction or disharmony of consciousness and being, individual aspiration and social bondage, man's innate religious need and his endemic inability to reach that solid assurance of metaphysical truth for which he longs.

As Lützeler shows, in valuable detail, Broch's peers, among both writers and thinkers, swiftly recognized the stature of his performance. But this recognition did not bring financial success. Here, as well, the analogy with Musil is uncannily close. Broch was still seeking to establish himself as a professional novelist when catastrophe came. The terrors of 1938-9 – Broch was, himself, briefly interned – and the experience of the refugee underwrote both Broch's most ambitious design, *The Death of Virgil*, and the novel of Alpine life and black magic variously entitled *Demeter*, *Die Verzauberung* or *the Bergroman*. It is the former which Broch himself saw as his *magnum opus*, as the crystallization of his anguished reflections on the ambiguous relations between poetry and political inhumanity, between language and the experience of truths, of moral claims, of personal needs beyond language. Though the sovereign precedent of Joyce, whom Broch held to be incomparable, weighs on the book, and though the tidal lyricism of its famous fourth section (*Virgil's* actual passage into death) pose formal and substantive problems, *The Death of Virgil* remains a major act and challenge. Now, one understands, in the process of being translated into English, the "Mountain Novel" is, together with Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus*, the most responsible, symbolically adequate fictional treatment we have of the roots of Nazism. Read, moreover, as an account of the mystery of the seasons, of the dynamics of light and of sound in an Alpine community, the novel has a marvellous sensuous vehemence. Only John Cowper Powys quite matches Broch's immersion in the daemonic vitality of the organic.

It is not Lützeler's purpose to write literary criticism. His commitment is rigorously biographical. Hence the inevitable *tristitia* of the second half of his chronicle. Broch experienced, at every level, the marginality, the more or less urbane humiliations of refugee existence, briefly in Britain, then in the United

States. Though Thomas Mann and Einstein bore witness for him, though he found a rare hospitality and understanding in the house of Erich Kahler (his presence haunts it still), Broch worked under conditions of deepening material and psychic stress. He expended anxious labours on interminable projects for international peace, for reconciliation, for the codification of a corpus of world law. Again and again, he set aside his literary labours in order to accumulate and organize material about the psychology of mass behaviour, of mass politics as they had been instrumental in Fascism and Nazism (here, the parallel is with Canetti's work on crowds and power). Himself worn out and almost destitute, Broch fought tirelessly for the survival and minimal dignity of refugees even less privileged. Lützeler's record is thorough and poignant. He does well to remind one that the department of German at Princeton University refused even marginal status or employment to one of the masters of the German language.

Broch died in May 1951, literally exhausted. Almost at once, the range and eminence of his writings began to be recognized. Numerous critical uncertainties do persist. Beginning with the third part of *The Sleepwalkers*, Broch tends to over-write, as if under the pressure of some lyrical vision, as if obsessed with the Neoplatonic dream of a musicalized thought. A mellifluous pathos, not unrelated perhaps to his engagement with psychoanalysis, often enfeebls the argument. Here Musil's astringent economy and ironizing intelligence suggest a damaging contrast. Mann's irritation at the oracular, oceanic prodigality of *The Death of Virgil* is worth noting. But these are open questions; and it is towards their more responsible discussion that Professor Lützeler's biography provides an invaluable dossier.

An English translation of Paul Michael Lützeler's biography of Herman Broch will be published in the autumn by Quartet. Quartet will also publish *The Sleepwalkers* in their Encounters series this March.

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Anthony Clare

MARJORIE WALLACE
The Silent Twins
224pp. Chatto and Windus. £10.95.
0701127120

A story of "a mystic bondage . . . a silent war . . . the struggle for individuality" – the description by Marjorie Wallace in her introduction to this book leads one to expect a pulp fiction. And *The Silent Twins*, indeed, reads like an unbelievable melodrama. It is the story of a set of identical twins who from birth refuse to speak to any adult, who communicate with their own parents by means of written notes, who steadily confound the efforts of teachers, educational counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists, who slowly deteriorate through an adolescence marred by promiscuity, experiments with drugs and delinquency, until they are charged and convicted of theft. Diagnosed as psychopathic, they are sent, at the age of nineteen, to Broadmoor Special Hospital to serve an indeterminate sentence.

Yet the story is true. June and Jennifer Gibbons were born to West Indian parents in Aden, where their father was serving in the Royal Air Force, and brought up in the small Welsh town of Haverfordwest. From early childhood they appeared unusual; the word "zombie" came to the mind of the school medical officer, who was chilled by their lack of emotional response during a routine vaccination and medical examination. They twittered away to themselves in a language so fast that not even their parents could understand it but, when recorded and played back at a slower pace, it turned out to be English, spoken at extreme speed and with subtly changed stresses on many words. Tongue-tie was suspected and they eventually underwent surgery, but this made little difference. Psychological testing was frustrated by their refusal to co-operate and by a massive emotional withdrawal. Most disturbing of all, the twins would perform a variety of physical movements in perfect unison, crossing and uncrossing their legs in syn-



Jennifer and June Gibbons, reproduced from the book reviewed here.

chrony, goose-stepping in single file down the road from school, holding and changing positions like two little guardsmen on parade. "I think I'm watching some crazy variety duo", said one psychologist.

Their schooling was disastrous. Various efforts, including attempts to separate them, were made to no avail. They left school with one CSE each and after a period spent in the privacy of their bedroom, during which they played intensely serious and elaborate games with dolls, they entered adolescence in a spectacular flurry of sexual experiment, alcohol abuse and periodic aggression. Both kept diaries and June began to write vivid, steamy novels. One of these, *The Pepsi-Cola Addict*, was, after the twins had saved their unemployment benefit to pay the publishing fee, eventually published by a vanity publishing firm.

It is not the twins' actions which makes the

story fascinating and disturbing as much as the degree to which their individual personalities were buried within each other. Neither of them appears to have been able to survive without the other, yet together they lived out a mutually destructive, cannibalistic existence. Jennifer appears to have exercised the greater power, with a peculiar blend of charm, the sinister practice of West Indian magic and downright physical violence. June struggles to break free, yet, when offered the chance through enforced separation, she pines and deteriorates until she is reunited with her sister.

Throughout the book, the question of what is wrong with them recurs. They are clearly not mentally handicapped, indeed they would appear to be above average in intelligence. They are not psychotic. Their criminal behaviour, a mixture of petty delinquency and

orgiastic arson – one fire caused over £100,000 worth of damage – seems to lack any clear, comprehensible motivation. In court, their defence counsel pleaded mental illness, pointing as evidence a psychiatrist's diagnosis of "psychopathic disorder", defined in the Mental Health Act (1959) as a "persistent disorder or disability of mind which results in abnormally aggressive or seriously irresponsible conduct". Wallace is not greatly taken with this diagnosis and regards the defence argument as "tenuous" and illustrative of "the inequity of the definition of a psychopath". Yet she seems equally at a loss, despite her immense knowledge of the twins, their writings and behaviour in Broadmoor where, at the invitation of their psychiatrist, she has visited and interviewed them regularly over the past three years. On the basis of her own account, I am inclined to agree with those psychiatrists who argue that the twins suffer from a form of personality disorder, although the possibility that, as they grow older, they may develop clear-cut psychotic symptoms cannot be ruled out.

My only caveat with this absorbing but is that Miss Wallace tends at times to make estimate the formidable and largely desolate impact the two girls exert on those who struggle to help and understand them. She is struck by the poignancy and melancholy of their writings as the reader will be by the numerous photographs of Jennifer and June, who mostly appear as two wide-eyed, pretty little schoolgirls looking as though butter would not melt in their mouths. It is a common misunderstanding to assume that a disorderly personality means an irremediably degenerate soul, devoid of sensitivity, intuition or human warmth. It is precisely this mixture of emotional depth and cold-blooded ruthlessness, of child-like dependence and stoical indifference, of clinging demands and explosive violence in these girls that makes them at once so appealingly vulnerable and so unpredictable and dangerous. One day, writes June, "We will be quietly, secretly released, mature women. All things must end. New things begin." Let us hope she is right.

Nevertheless the parts give some idea why John Fuller should have played a significant role in maintaining the modern "line of wit" running from Auden to Porter and Fenton. He's sophisticated, unashamedly intellectual poet, fascinated by the possibilities of playing with inherited conventions and poetic forms. He has proved influential by his example –

The art of agility

Hugh Haughton

JOHN FULLER
Selected Poems 1954-1982
175pp. Secker and Warburg. £8.95.
0436167549

John Fuller is an Oxford don and poet who is also the son of a better-known poet and former Oxford Professor of Poetry. Peter Porter described him as a "key figure in contemporary British poetry" and James Fenton called him a "secret guru" for many younger Oxford-associated poets like himself, yet despite his eight books of poetry and the successful Booker short-listed novel *Flying to Nowhere*, Fuller has remained an elusive poet, with little representation in anthologies – influential certainly, but not widely read. The welcome publication of his *Selected Poems 1954-82* might bring him to a wider audience, though I rather doubt it. It certainly doesn't make him any less an elusive poet or curious phenomenon.

Fuller is an adaptable writer, a master of many manners and from first to last a contriver of "beautiful inventions", but it's hard to size up this academic Proteus as he switches from the Audenesque to the Ransomesque to the Rinesque, from academic sonnet to cosmopolitan verse-novel, don's diary to Victorian pastiche to Marlian arabesque. The successful poems are miniature triumphs within their own terms, but they don't seem to establish resonances between each other or with the intractable world outside. This *Selected Poems*, for all its well-tempered virtuosity, doesn't seem to be more than the sum of its parts.

Nevertheless the parts give some idea why John Fuller should have played a significant role in maintaining the modern "line of wit" running from Auden to Porter and Fenton. He's sophisticated, unashamedly intellectual poet, fascinated by the possibilities of playing with inherited conventions and poetic forms. He has proved influential by his example –

Fenton declared his debts in the "Letter to John Fuller" which spoofed Alvarez's urgently suicidal poetics, while Fuller's verse in the 1960s showed a remarkable anticipation of both the Craig Raine manner and recent interest in poetic narrative – but he is also visibly a prey to the influence of others, Auden in particular. His poems aren't always easy to read, but it's often easy to know what he's been reading. He is an expert at pastiche, of course, best seen in "The Most Difficult Position", a Nabokovian study of nineteenth-century chess grandmasters that rivals Auden's *Letter to Lord Byron* in its extended reference to poetic predecessors. Yet it's not always easy to know where pastiche begins and ends in his work. "Ghost Village", for example, works up a cryptic, quasi-allegorical geography of inside and outside to evoke "the ghosts who must be faced / Who questioned the blind world", but it is itself dominated by the Audenesque manner:

Their children were the first to make shy advances,
Wove with fingers, were pinioned, wept, touched,
Cruelly accused the unhappy of being only
unhappy.
Talked incessantly of the marriage of headland and
valley
And thought of nothing much to say, but learned
to read.

This looks less like a questioning ghost faced, than a bigger poetic voice submitted to.

Fuller may not have much to "say" either, but he has certainly learned to read, and it is the very arbitrariness of the "literary" that appeals to him. The first poem here is an ironic comment on the fairy-tale convention in sonnet form, and tells the story of a blushing heroine who flees the "fustian prospect of a farmer's lap" only to find, in the final couplet's comic finale of coupling, that "worse than all the sniggers in the wood / The waiting prince was ugly, pale and good". Another sonnet gives an Empsonian reading of Helen of Troy in old age as Lewis Carroll's pallid, scatty White Queen; another a riddling essay on Spenser ("clownish without armour") in the form of an inconclusive episode in Spenserian

romance; a fourth elaborates a Victorian genre-piece about a little girl confronting Mr Dodgson with a "case of puzzles" in a railway carriage (from riddle to romance and vice versa), while a double-sonnet acts out a Marvellian dialogue between fingers and toes. Such witty fables, with their parade of dexterity and allegory, celebrate the art of being for ever agile.

From the outset, then, Fuller was a master of the stylish bagatelle. In later books he includes more notation of circumstance and local detail, but he always insists on an elegant or perverse stylization. He writes with art on sleeve. "Hedge Tutor", for instance, an account of a walk along a country lane with his small daughter, transforms the pedestrian by means of gentle but artful transposition of the kind associated with Raine: "Consulting the calendar of hedges / Banked up higher than your head / We seem to share the surprise of walking / On a riverbed", while "Objet Trouvé: Piazza San Marco" ends with a surreal Firbankian apotheosis as he imagines "How Mark rose upwards through the air / Out of his feet left standing there", and "How round his pretty feet they built the square" – less an *objet trouvé* than a rather camp *objet d'art*. His brief and witty history of post-Renaissance music from "Celestial jig and Orphic toot" to Baroque music evolved from "cruel instruments" reshapes its own neo-Augustan elegance even as it criticizes the suspect formalizations of the Baroque:

Thus purged into its trilling were
Emotions of the rope and chase
As wigs replaced the natural hair
And formalised each pitted face.
He reduces the Niagara Falls to the careful
euphemistic elegance of:
Fierce aquatic carelessness!
Your great arenas celebrate
The sensible decision of a river
To undergo a sudden fate.

Fuller's third book, *Cannibals and Missionaries*, represents him at his worst with its

elaborately allegorical and elegantly "light verse" academy pieces – mannerist exercises about Oxford and his country cottage in Wales. When not turning out "light verse" of this kind, he was concocting stilled Audenesque topographical poems (like "Ghost Village") and stilling opaque narratives like the sonnet sequence "The Two Sisters" or the hit-and-miss monologue "Her Morning Dreams" ("The unmade bed. Finger on my pink. / Dead as he groaned upon a linen ocean. / Who would have thought he had such little ink?").

After the playful virtuosity of the first books and the mannerist cul-de-sac of the third, Fuller seems to have found himself in his next four, from the witty verse-letters of *Epistles to Several Persons* (1973) to the Byronic narrative of *The Illusionists* (1980). These contain his liveliest and most interesting work, in touch with colloquial idiom and recognizable social realities, at home with his chosen literary conventions. The epistles (only one of which is included here) helped him find a voice with which to confront his subjects and audience directly and lightly. The "Epistle to Angus Macintyre" is a jokey light-verse commentary on his rural retreat in Wales which manages to accommodate a tough and buoyant range of tones and arguments:

Are we much better? Aren't we fakers
Pacing about our fenced-off acres?
Aren't we the economic Quakers?
In a cold war
Between the strikers and the strike-breakers?
What are we for?

The light-fingered virtuosity with which he uses the Burns stanza enables him to shift between self-criticism of this sort to genial self-celebration à la Byron. The poem is at home with laid-back academic jokes ("The academic's one excuse is / He knows about the gastric juices. / Suppression of the anacrusis") and the absurd *faux divers* of the newspaper ("We're as incognito / As is the CIA in SEATO / A worker Jesuit in Quito / Selling pardons / Or the emperor Hirohito / In Kew Gardens") but

Excuses for not dying

Rosemary Dinnage

DIANA ATHILL
After a Funeral
158pp. Cape. £9.50.
0224 028340

Some twenty years ago Diana Athill published *Instead of a Letter* (reviewed in the TLS, November 11, 1963), an account of her life up to that date, a statement of loss and recovery, that was a small classic. Now with the same gentle skill she has written the story of a disastrous relationship, extending over several years and ending in suicide.

Her friend Didi, as she fictionally calls him, was an Egyptian exiled from home for his political beliefs. He was ten years younger than her (and went to some pains to present himself as younger still) and had written a book that she had liked. She was, she says, "a sucker for oppressed foreigners" and seized on the new friendship eagerly. At the start things went well enough, partly because Didi showed only his charming and amusing side but chiefly because Diana Athill was more than a little in love with him (although she already had a lover). Didi, young himself and attracted only to elegant, youthful brunettes, held a card or two in his hand at this point. "I can't make love to you, you know", he would sigh regretfully, and note in his diary how much he must have humiliated her. In fact, she was extremely emotionally robust, so soon got over her temporary paria. The relationship became a maternal, protective one on her side – though she admits she would never have put herself out for a woman or for a man she had not been attracted to. She emerges from her own account as extremely good-natured and tolerant – but she always has a sharp eye for her own mixed motives.

It was the mother/son, benefactor/protégé relationship which eventually proved fatal.

Psychoanalysts are aware of the phenomenon of "transference", whereby the full blasts of love and hate rooted in a patient's childhood are transferred to them, and they protect themselves well. It was transference that Athill and Didi became even more embroiled in. She grew patronizing towards him, certainly ("I thought it encouraging that he wanted to earn his keep to some extent, and that it would be a good thing to foster the idea", she says of his plan to take over the cleaning of the house they lived in); but it was his attitude that ensured that he would be patronized.

This stage of the relationship dated from the time that she obtained a work permit for him and had him move in as non-paying house guest. His compulsive gambling, drinking and

idleness began to oppress his no longer enthusiastic landlady. They became hooked on a compulsive game which – psychological penetration being one of her cards – she describes clearly; they were obsessed with each other's movements, with little put-downs, with falsely affectionate mannerisms. Together with other friends, they spent a disastrous holiday abroad. The wretched Didi, without work, without home, without guts – "You think that because you are in the position of power you can make me do anything you like", he once screamed – did hold one card still: his diary. As in the Tolstoy household, this was left around so that no passing rage or despair should be left unread. After the holiday, Athill chanced on a paean of hatred and revulsion for her behaviour on holiday: "I find her unbearable . . . dishing out one tedious stupid sentence after another . . . being 'jolly' in an English way . . . running backwards and forwards and screaming and trying to be funny" – and much more. She was shattered and asked him to leave; he stayed. She tried to persuade him to see a psychiatrist; he countered with an imaginary brain tumour. Finally, they did spend one night together, and it was pleasant and forgettable. If the book were fiction, says the author, the story would end there.

But there was an ironic final twist to come. They had got each other out of their positions. Didi seemed to flourish; Athill at least had the advantage of feeling benevolent towards her hanger-on. In the end, she says, his suicide happened because there was no more chance to vent hatred on her, to more cat-and-mouse games to be played. He ran out of excuses for not dying just yet.

From his diary it is clear that he knew how basically flawed was his ability to live. "I am left in this hopeless state of seething despair", he wrote, "in my thirties, intelligent, formerly self-aware, overpowered by the feelings of a child . . . hopelessness, self-pity – an ugly and repulsive self-pity – and such despair, isolation, loneliness and finally utter darkness." Though he went through crisis after crisis of hopelessness "love" for women, they were no more real people to him than those hurricanes that we give female names. Each time, as such as the crisis of possession receded, his basic revulsion towards women reappeared.

One may see this agonizing story as the exposure and exploitation by the author of her friend's memory, or as an obituary written by what there was of good in him and in his relationship. She herself closes by saying that it is for him and for people who are going to love children; if any such account can have power, from imposing a deforming childhood, it should. But in the end the book stands or falls for itself alone, and stand it does.

The House of Jacob from a People of Strange Language

Slips from me like a tongue
I don't want to know
cattle-raid,
book of the tribe,
their slow sheensong
as clouds herd
through an abiding.

At high tide
red millet
shoal to the creamery's
stainless downpipe.
Two men on the rocks
drop eard possets
into the warm
each mumbled hook
comes skinking back.

TOM PAULIN

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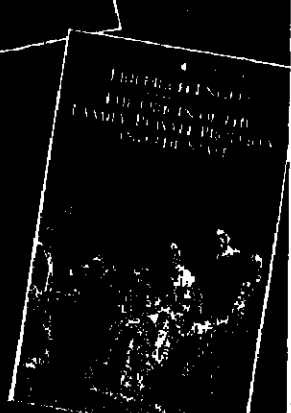
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able to allow the concluding sober pleas for "some vision to achieve" and forgiveness for "Our scared retreats, both small and big". It is that kind of interplay between "small and big", intellectual and trivial pursuits, acted out in the tonal and allusive mobility of the verse, which characterizes the best in his next three books, but gets lost, to my mind, in his most recent two, *Waiting for the Music* (1982) and *The Beautiful Inventions* (1983), with their rather precious aestheticism.

The Mountain in the Sea (1975) is full of bucolic Welsh poems of place which are stylish exercises in intricate map-making. They comment on "the precise text of a leaf" or chart the way a house is "establishing its relations with the hill" or trace the remains of Iron Age huts on a hillside, "a ground-plan of biographies which might yet be revived" and are marked by (for Fuller) an unusual density of physical presence, the contours of particular places and histories. They still parade their own ingenuity and favour a rhetoric of the snappily absurd based on the shock of the arbitrary. In the excellent "Up and Down", his sheep acquire an incongruous proprietorial grandeur - "They own everything, / Saddled with foot-thick wool / And a family resemblance / Like the first Marlboroughs" - as well as an incongruous domesticity: they move "like ancient sofas" on their castors on the "edible" mountain where "their paths are meals". Like Craig Raine after him, Fuller relies heavily on the Flash Simile.

Lies and Secrets (1979) is up and down too, starting with the absurd and touching portrait of an up-ended woman, "Annie Upside Down" ("It's the whole earth turned inside out like a sock / And me just hanging on") and ending with "The Most Difficult Position", his three-part closet drama about two nineteenth-century chess grandmasters who never actually do battle with each other. He's generally a rather frustrating narrative poet since nothing much happens worth telling, and perhaps for that reason the poem about the mandarin discomforts of the legendary chess virtuosi Staunton and Morphy may be Fuller's most convincing performance to date. Morphy, a neurotic American tyro, a kind of Rimbaud of the chess world, arrives in England to challenge the established world champion Staunton, Shakespearean scholar and gentleman, and the poem explores their attitudes towards the great match that never takes place. Fuller portrays the inner drama of the two men by way of dazzling pastiche of the styles of the two grandmasters of Victorian dramatic monologue, Browning and Clough, those worldly and unworldly experts in trapped, secular self-consciousness. Morphy speaks in Clough-like hexameters of the fascination of arbitrary conventions:

The fictions of law, the fictions of rules, the fictions of papers,
The fictions of red and white, the thirty-two little fictions
Which have nothing to do with the heart, for that they may break
And what they break stands apart

whereas Staunton speaks with the self-justifying, self-apologizing eloquence of Browning's blank verse:

But still you see the life of the thing. My point
Is that it is like life, supremely so,

And all the world's a stage. The entrances
And exits finely done. Above all, exits!
So many ways and Shakespeare knew them all.

"I'm sorry there wasn't room in the *Selected* for more than one chapter of his Byronic (or Pushkinian) verse-novel comedy of manners about the metropolitan art-marketing world, *The Illusionists*. The one given is another virtuoso exercise in narrative self-consciousness, depicting a secretary's morose dreams and breakfast and taking on Pope and Eliot at their own game.

Being a widow in East Ptoher she didn't mention Distmuth
Fearing that something was afoot
Beginning with life, moving to dinner
And after dinner, plants and verse
And after dinner something worse.

It makes great play with social stereotypes, journalistic cliché and consumer detail as it evokes secretarial dreams, the "Camford graduate grotesque" and the oily, lecherous art-dealer Distmuth ("Clipping eight fingers from the table / In the 'fourth' emphasis"), but

for all its nods and winks and (Clive) Jamesian high-jinks, and however accurately it inventories a modern handbag or a "Freudian" dream, its brand of light-verse narrative seems rather old hat - a pastiche of pastiche, as in the *Byronism* of "Nico was half in love with failure / While Tim was twice in love with what? / With youth? with Love? but surely not / With Polly Passenger". Hang it all, there can be but one *Don Juan*.

The felicities of Fuller's most recent books seem a bit thin after the self-conscious social comedy of *The Illusionists*. They include many rather Martian postcards from abroad and notes on domestic music. So we have a flute being "the most surgical of the instruments" and a "telescope for a wind's song", a double-bass player acting as a "drunk leaning companionably / Against a lamp post" and a pianist enjoying a "banquet for one". The poem on "Ironing" has handkerchiefs "imposed in 16mo / And lastly collated", shirts laid upstairs in opened "coffins" and ties imagined as a "fatal noose". Though he's a skilled exponent of this manner and can use it to serve up the rumpled ordinary world in a smart, eye-taking fashion, Fuller doesn't have Raine's thrillingly luxurious sense of the commonplace world, the domestic as a perversely utopian bower of bliss.

The poetry seems weakest when it attempts a strong voice (as in the portentous "Perhaps it was something the heart thought / Loud in its cave of blood. If so, what matter?") and strongest in the light-verse set-pieces like the *raguée* album-verse about pornography called "Amazing" ("So many jobs for the hands / And explored hinterlands / So many, well-used glands / Saw I never") or the up-dated variation on romance-conventions in "Valentine" ("You

are the end of self-abuse. / You are the end of feminine. / I'd like to find a good excuse / I call on you and find you in") or the diatribe Betjemanesque urban pastoral about a glider from a Reading biscuit factory ("Linda, Linda slender and pretty / Biscuit girl in a biscuit city").

But even here, there seems to be something stilted about the idiom - maybe his sense of "light verse" is itself precarious and questionable, a thing of the past, less like the miscellany of Auden's many-mannered, socially perceptive anthology than Kingsley Amis's collection of smoking-room ditties and good many jokes. When the College ghost in the poem of that name speaks in fluent *Academic* ("Theories of diet dispersed tribes, infectious / Accompanied stately truths like interpreters"), I find it hard to distinguish the poet's own voice, even as he confronts his own failings of failure and betrayal in the last lines of the book:

Thoughts too late to unthink; I had the feeling
Of being betrayed by something of my feeling.
Something I had connived at, something belonging
To the projection of a long-suspected falling.
Haunted by the forces it exploits.

Like "The Most Difficult Position" and the "Letter" "The College Ghost" takes a well-worked form, and through a mix of pastiche and projection, portrays an uneasy academic's self-consciousness about his privileged fluency and "mastery". It's hard, reading Fuller, not to ponder Bloomian fantasies about the anxieties of influence, but is this a post-Modernist "judic" triumph? Or the final compound ghost of Eng Lit? The ghost in the machine of this frequently subtle, funny poetry is often just the Oxford college ghost.

A clear-eyed casualty

Neil Corcoran

CHARLES HAMILTON SORLEY
The Collected Poems
Edited by Jean Moorcroft Wilson
144pp. Cecil Woolf. £9.95.
0900821 531

JEAN MOORCROFT WILSON
Charles Hamilton Sorley: A biography
222pp. Cecil Woolf. £12.50.
0900821 523

Charles Hamilton Sorley was born in 1895 and was killed on October 13, 1915, during the Battle of Loos on the Western Front. He is remembered, in the anthologies, for a handful of poems written in the earliest phase of the war: "Two Sonnets", "When you see millions of the mouthless dead", "All the hills and vales along" and "In Memoriam S. C. W., VC". His is, almost, the generic life, and death, of the First World War poet: a comfortable professional background (his father was the Cambridge philosopher, William Ritchie Sorley); public school (Marlborough), where he published a large amount of "promising" juvenilia; a scholarship to Oxford rejected for the taking up of a commission; and the end, at the age of twenty, as the victim of a sniper's bullet. The clumsy pathos of the second of the "Two Sonnets" may be read as a definition of the reader's response to this attenuated life, as to so many others of that war:

But a big blot has hid each yesterday
So poor, so manifestly incomplete.
The poems in Jean Moorcroft Wilson's edition are also manifestly incomplete, most of the earlier pieces little more than an adolescent stew of Meredith and Massfield. It is, in all honesty, difficult to do anything at all with them; and I can see no justification whatever for preserving anything in the section Wilson calls "Juvenilia and Occasional Poems".

The war poems themselves, however, are certainly a reason for thinking seriously about Sorley in any account of the literature of the First World War. They are all poems which, even though written very early, sound much more as if they had been written after the experience of battle: they consistently refuse the temptations and consolations of a conventional patriotism. What is most interesting in Jean

Moorcroft Wilson's biography is its account of what provoked, in this superficially unexceptional career, such an exceptional response.

Sorley, it turns out, although he was very successful there, was never completely at ease with the ethos of Marlborough. He at one point considered leaving to become an elementary school teacher, and he did in fact leave two terms early to spend a pre-Oxford period in Germany. This biography is heavily dependent on the edition of Sorley's letters made by his father in 1919; and the letters quoted from this period all describe or imply various kinds of awakening, both literary and sexual. Although Sorley was actually caught in Germany by the outbreak of war, and briefly imprisoned, his intimacy with the German language, culture and people left him in no mood, on his return to England, to share the jingoistic anti-German feeling of the war's early months. The poem "To Germany", probably written in August 1914, imagines the war as "the blind light [ing] the blind"; and Sorley was scathing about Brooke's "1914".

It is far too obsessed with his own sacrifice regarding the going to war of himself (and others) as a highly intense, remarkable and sacrificial exploit, whereas it is merely the conduct demanded of him (and others) by the turn of circumstances, where the compliance with this demand would have made him intolerable. . . . He has clothed his attitude in these words: but he has taken the sentimentalist's attitude.

The Owen-like "When you see millions of the mouthless dead" seems, in part, to have been intended as a response to Brooke; and the clear-eyed honesty of this passage, with its ruthless rejection of cant and its insistence, at that repeated parenthesis, on the commonness, not the uniqueness, of the experience, strongly suggests the kind of poet Sorley might have become. The spare, measured, analytical prose is typical of Sorley's excellent letters. One of the many quoted by Wilson worth looking up in their entirety is the amazing letter of January 25, 1915, which begins, "England - I am sick of the sound of the word". It is resonant with Sorley's excited discovery of D. H. Lawrence; and it is testimony to the marvellous, relentless and brave intelligence, concentrated in these books. One can be grateful to Jean Moorcroft Wilson for her set of poems while still wondering whether a well-chosen selection of the letters and war poems would not have made a better book.

Wondering who owns the furniture

Andrew Hislop

WILLIAM GADDIS
Carpenter's Gothic
262pp. Deutsch. £8.95.
0233 979328

-A Novel?
-Not a, no no it's more of a book about order and disorder more of a, sort of social history of mechanization and the arts, the destructive element . . .
-It sounds a little difficult, is it?
-Difficult as I can make it.

William Gaddis, like the would-be social historian in his last novel, *JR*, makes it difficult for himself and his readers. American literary consumers like their fare fast, flash-fried, and even when the food is not instant the cooks should be seen sweating over the stoves, getting their fingers burnt. Gaddis, however, goes to ground, is forgotten, then pops up suddenly with a large, strange egg that he has buried with him. It is an acquired taste, and those who sample it have more than enough time to lose it - ten years since *JR*, which won the National Book Award, twenty years between that and his first book, *The Recognitions* (1955).

"You know what I used to think Mama?" says a child in *JR*; "if I didn't talk now, if I kind of saved it up and didn't talk, that then I'd be able to talk after I'm dead." J. D. Salinger is enough of a legend now to write only for posthumous publication; Gaddis has to play dead. But he

saves it up. *The Recognitions*, a labyrinthine, witty exploration of the fake in life and art, centering on Watt Gwyon who forges Flemish masters for love rather than profit, weighs in at just under 1000 large pages of small print; *JR*, a picaresque farrago in which an eleven-year-old, illiterate, if numerate, schoolboy builds a vast fiscal empire, just over 700. Resurrection time has come round again, and welcome it is. Gaddis has been given a high profile in the "Authors USA" jamboree, Penguin have republished his first two novels (£7.95 each) and we have now a new one, only this time the egg, though strange as ever, is much smaller.

Carpenter's Gothic is set on the Hudson in a house of that style, "built to be seen from outside . . . a patchwork of conceits, borrowings, deceptions, the inside's a hodgepodge of good intentions like one last ridiculous effort at something worth doing even on this small a scale". The stage is much more confined than in the previous novels - we are only very briefly allowed out of the house - and the characters, on set at least, are fewer: Paul Booth, fringed Vietnam veteran and ousted corporate businessman turned media-consultant for the fundamentalist evangelist the Reverend Ude; his wife, Liz, ignorant with cultural aspirations, frustrated - as woman, as a would-be novelist, even as an heiress, her fortune irretrievably bound up in a trust; her layabout, sometime hippy brother, Billy; McCandless, who rents the house to the Booths - geologist, ex-gold prospector and novelist, punctured

prophet against the armies of ignorance such as Ude's; and a few bit parts including McCandless's wife Irene, Lester, a past associate with secret service connections, and the deliciously named Haitian cleaner, friend of dust and enemy of the English language, Madame Socrate.

Changes in scale, however, emphasize continuities in Gaddis's work rather than a radical shift. *Carpenter's Gothic* maintains his preoccupation with the barbaric complexities of modern America, in which endemic ignorance of the civilizing order of culture is matched only by the impossibility of ordering the workings of power, money and ideology in a mass-media, technological society into art. "Order is simply a thin perilous condition we try to impose on the basic reality of chaos" says *JR*'s failed social historian, while its failed novelist found everything around him so real "he couldn't see straight long enough to write a sentence". In *Carpenter's Gothic* McCandless has a favourite passage marked in a book: "A man, I suppose, fights only when he hopes, when he has a vision of order . . . But there was my vision of disorder which it was beyond any one man to put right."

In *JR* Gaddis literally reproduces the impossibility of ordering the chaos by making it "unreadable", but not only in the trite sense that it is too long for the non-obsessive to get through. It takes the "realist text" of the novel beyond the grasp of the reader, not by deconstructing it so much as overconstructing it. Its form is the most "naturalist" of fictional modes - the continuous present of direct speech: a seamless, chapterless chorus of unattributed voices, broken only very rarely by short, poetic descriptions lyrically rolling language to the limits of grammaticality before returning to the dialogue, often with the speakers and location changed. Gaddis mimics much of everyday speech but extends it until it often becomes an

overblown, indigestible outpouring of phatic stutters and outraged articulation, colloquial ramblings and detailed explanations. A basic plot is visible but is soon overwhelmed by the multiplying connections between the many characters, too numerous and complex to be understood.

Its very vastness, however, offers the possibility that in time, a long time, all could be unraveled. But the modesty of scale in *Carpenter's Gothic* only emphasizes the impossibility of finding such a solution. (We are even given chapters and more interludes of poetic description to make the dialogue easier going.) Location may be limited, characters on stage few, but soon the intricacies of the relationships and murky dealings extend, with increasingly bemusing complexity, into wider fields: politics, religion, science, medicine - with disputes about the origins of man thrown in for good measure. Conspiratorial intrigue reaches everywhere, even as far as Africa. McCandless at one time draws arrows between names in an attempt to trace out the power lines: "more arrows, everything to everything else . . . and a hail of arrows darkened the page like the skies that day over Crécy". But in the end many of the premises of the conspiracy seem like the house, a patchwork of conceits, borrowings, deceptions.

"There's a much more stupidity than malice in the world," admits McCandless, but then for him ignorance is "dead serious" and "revealed truth is the one weapon stupidity's got against intelligence". The readers of *Carpenter's Gothic*, however enidite and clever they may be, will laugh loud with Gaddis at his exposure of the chaos and ignorance of modern American culture, but could also be left feeling seriously stupid. Never mind the complexities, when Irene at the end of the book debunks our assumption that it is hers, we end up not even knowing who owns the furniture.

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Back home with the tan blond boys

Alan Jenkins

BRET EASTON ELLIS
Less than Zero
 208pp. Picador. Paperback, £2.95.
 0 330 294008

Clay, the narrator of *Less than Zero*, has come home to Los Angeles for Christmas from his "school" back east. Clay is in his late teens; his parents are divorced; he stays with his mother and horrible younger sisters, sees his father once or twice, but in the way of all such holidays he spends most of his time hanging out with friends of his own age. Clay's friends are called Spit, Rip, Finn, Spin, Derf and Trent. Sometimes the names prove too much to manage, or remember, and they just call each other "dude". They are barely distinguishable in other respects too: most are "tan, blond" boys, they do a lot of drugs, go to a lot of parties and discos, pay a lot of attention to their clothes and appearance generally, do some sleeping with girls (Blair, Kim, Alana, Didi) and with each other, and none of them has much to say about anything. They are the ultra-rich, ultra-cool children of film people who are mostly away in Aspen or London or somewhere else, they favour BMWs and Porsches, shop in places called La Scala, Privilege and Parachute, drink at the Café Casino or the Westward Ho or Pages or Du par's, and sit around watching rock-music videos at each other's homes (or it might be *Allen* or it might, unfortunately, be a snuff-movie). Sometimes, when high, they get together and do ungentlemanly things to girls even younger than themselves, girls not yet in their teens, whom they have first rendered semi-unconscious with drugs.

Clay's participation in this "lifestyle", his growing distaste for it and his eventual wordless rebellion against its more vicious spasms of

discontent (being very far gone in mental emptiness, boredom or drug-debts, the youngsters must occasionally go correspondingly far in search of kicks or money), are recorded in a present-tense prose so flat, so studiously neutral, laid back and spaced out that it comes very close indeed to inarticulacy. Syntax and diction are never more than rudimentary; even so, grasp on the sentence is lost more than once. This may be a mimetic ploy, insinuating a state of shell-shocked extremity in a mind (the narrator's) already hampered by the fact that it has only a very limited range of responses, and almost no expressive capabilities, at its disposal. At times it reproduces with numbing accuracy the intermittent catatonic lows of a psycho-physical system artificially stimulated beyond normal human endurance. It may of course be that Bret Easton Ellis has learned less in writing school back east than he thinks he has, or than some reviewers think he has.

Take the "languid comic terror" attributed to him on the dust-jacket. There are one or two memorably comical moments, certainly, but these are far from simple: are we laughing because something is being effectively satirized, or in nervously hysterical reaction to a dislocation of "normal" reality (and the habitual blankness of Clay and his set involves a good deal of that), or in disbelief?

Though the novel deals with terminal boredom and mindless repetition, it is not quite boring or mindless. In the cinematic arrangement of the short scenes, the threading of leitmotif phrases ("People are afraid to merge", "Wonder if he's for sale", "Disappear here") through the narration, the carefully unmodulated switches from catalogues of brand-names to gang-rape and the other uses of Bain de Soleil lotion, there is evidence of a concern for form and of a genuine instinct for literary "cool", for understatement or non-statement. Ellis catches some things very well: the back-

ground of rock-lyric sentiments to adolescent life (Clay's hero is Elvis Costello, from one of whose songs the title *Less than Zero* is taken), the vacuities of what passes in this world for conversation, the all-pervadingness of savagery and fear, the nameless menace of the surrounding desert encroaching on the no less inhuman city—a scream heard in the night, cars burning on the roads, the sound of glass breaking "in the hills", a coyote prowling a suburban street. Violence takes over too explicitly, and too suddenly, in the closing sections, but it is at such moments that Clay's stunned inner world seems most to reflect an appropriately played-down respect for the facts (the horrors evoked here are, apparently, the facts). In italicized, highly descriptive, sensuous passages recalling childhood days spent with a comparatively united family at a Palm Springs holiday house, or, for once roused to rage, putting his appalling psychiatrist straight, or shuffling bewilderedly around his on-off, unsatisfactory, failing attachment to Blair, his girl (who seems momentarily to share with him the merest

inkling of something better, a glimpse of love, commitment, mutuality that premature world-weariness and self-loathing cut them off from). Clay is sympathetic, even touching. At the close, a song provokes him to some kind of insight: "The images I had were of people being driven mad by living in the city. Images of parents who were so hungry and unfulfilled that they ate their own children . . . Images so violent and malicious that they seemed to be my only point of reference for a long time afterwards." A reviewer ought to be able to end by comparing him to Holden Caulfield and this book to *Catcher in the Rye*, but it's not really on.

Less than Zero will no doubt make, as already made, its author a great deal of money, but the price will have been too high if its success commits him to repeating the tone of ambiguous nihilism he sustains here. And the question remains how far that tone, thoroughly self-conscious performance though it seems, is a conscious achievement, how far it believes it is something else.

Warfare in the hinterland

Joanna Motion

MAVIS GALLANT
Home Truths: Stories
 330pp. Cape. £9.95.
 0 224 023446

The words "Canada" or "Canadian" appear in all but one of the stories in Mavis Gallant's collection *Home Truths*. Her people are constantly defining themselves, not just against those who belong to other nations, but also against each other. "I'm English-Canadian", announces a characteristically preoccupied Gallant child, "only I can talk French and I'm German descent on one side." By contrast, the child's cousin does not have to concern himself with analysis: "he is American, and that does".

The stories, written and published over twenty-five years, are here arranged in three groups: "At Home", "Canadians Abroad" and the set of six related stories that makes up "Linnet Muir". They form a sort of Three Bears menu of different sized bites. Recurring concerns thread through them: the fascination of Montreal; convent schooling; the past getting its tentacles around the present; and above all the tribal warfare and mutual disdain governing Canadian distinctions.

The first section consists of sharp, short, self-contained portraits of Canadians on their own doorsteps. The settings vary from Vancouver Island, where a prodigal father receives an ambiguous reception from a scarcely less prodigal daughter; to a northern train carrying a war bride to reappraise her husband. Their style travels from a clear-eyed, distanced reporting to a dream-like and mysterious unwinding, edged with menace.

Gallant is especially comfortable and convincing when the fiction enters the minds of children. Cool, controlled Ruth in "Thank You for the Lovely Tea" does a precise demolition job on the hopes of her would-be stepmother. She sits in judgment on her elders while absorbing from their behaviour useful briefings on the world she is to occupy: "Emotion was worse than bad taste; it was calamitous. Ruth had only to look at Mrs Holland to see what it led to."

The destinations emotion leads to, and the Canadian preference for suppressing it, are further explored in "Canadians Abroad"—longer excursions to the Mediterranean, Geneva, Paris and Strasbourg. In four substantial stories Gallant examines the sharper contrasts her characters make against an unfamiliar light. The greater space suits her. "The Ice Wagon Going Down the Street" gives her room for a compelling portrait of a couple counting on the legacy of their migrant forebears, an inheritance of grittiness, reputation and earned cash. By the fourth generation, they find the mixture poisonously dilute. Lotte Benz, the earnest scholarship student in "Virus X", brings her German-Canadian certainties to post-war France and sticks by her overhooves and gardenia bandeau in spite of smiles from the locals. But an association she

would never have bothered with at home takes her to the border land of Alsace-Lorraine, where firm lines are hard to draw and the only protection for Canadian convictions is to take them back across the Atlantic.

Gallant's prose is always a pleasure to read, but her writing goes up a gear as she switches into a fluent and passionate first-person narration for the final part of the collection. The Linnet Muir stories are large, overlapping pieces of a biographical jigsaw puzzle. The eighteen-year-old Linnet comes home to Montreal during the Second World War, wonderfully unencumbered by bossy relations and resolved never to be helpless again. She takes on the overwhelmingly male world of work; most of all she takes on the past. Returning to the place of her confusing, incomplete childhood, the young woman pieces together what those important ghosts, her parents and their circle, had been up to.

The stories pile up in layers. Linnet's impatient wartime experience of the rituals of office life and her excavation of the events and personalities of her parents' feyer generation are tied together by a retrospection that is very acute and wise. This format invests Gallant's Montreal with a richness, the sense of a hinterland, dense but never fully explored, which Alice Munro has given to the rural Canada of her own upbringing. Gallant is quite at home with the short story. She has a firm grip on place, an eye for the telling, oblique detail and an ear for defining dialogue. The smaller-scale offerings can be tasty but not altogether nourishing. In her linked short stories, however, Gallant engineers a pattern that is really satisfying: scope and weight seem to accumulate from the end of one story to the beginning of the next.

M. R. D. MEEK
The Split Second
 167pp. Collins. £7.50.
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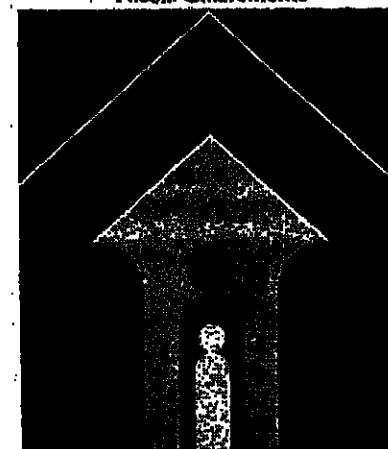
FORBES BRAMBLE
Dead of Winter
 185pp. Hamish Hamilton. £8.95.
 0 241 11686 4

John Gibbon, a newcomer to the village of Brimshill, is jogging past the church on Christmas Eve when he hears a shot: a bullet through the vicar's brain has brought the midnight service prematurely to an end. Excellent portrayal of village community and crafty, well-ordered plot. But the readiness of Inspector Mummery to accept—even to seek—Gibbon's assistance strikes a faintly false note.



THE PARADOX OF HISTORY

Nicola Chiaromonte



Translated by Joseph Frank
 Preface by Mary McCarthy

THE PARADOX OF HISTORY

Stendahl, Tolstoy, Pasternak, and Others

Nicola Chiaromonte

Preface by Joseph Frank

Postface by Mary McCarthy

"In six essays, [Chiaromonte] reflects on what he takes to be fundamental notions of the relations of individuals to those historical events that rock the foundations of their societies and overturn whole civilizations. He finds these notions represented most accurately and analyzed most profoundly not in the works of philosophers, social scientists or historians, but rather in the novels of such 'realists' as Stendahl, Tolstoy, Roger Martin du Gard, Malraux and Pasternak . . . Chiaromonte discovers in their literary representations of 'the paradox of history' a possible antidote to the 'faith in History' that has produced the totalitarian ideologies of our time . . . There is a great deal of wisdom in this book, the kind of wisdom that one can possess only as a result of having lived a certain kind of life. Chiaromonte bears witness convincingly."—*The New York Times Book Review*, 1985. 168 pages. Paper, ISBN 0-8122-1210-X, £13.95

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THE PARADOX OF HISTORY
 Stendahl, Tolstoy, Pasternak, and Others
 Nicola Chiaromonte
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Behind the lines

Lorna Sage

Twenty Thousand Streets under the Sky: The London novel 1896 to 1985, at the Bookspace in the Royal Festival Hall until March 12, is a tribute to the big city's seediness and excitement, its capacity to support divergent visions of itself, its teeming emptiness. The exhibition's compiler, Nick Kimberley, the book editor of *City Limits*, talks in the catalogue of "a deliberately idiosyncratic survey of some of London's fictions" — though it's hard to imagine a twentieth-century view of London novels that would produce much more of a consensus. Bloomsbury and Hampstead have, it is true, been pretty well excised from Mr Kimberley's map, and Orwell's London is taken as read. Still, the effect of scatter and blitz is convincingly representative, from Arthur Morrison's *A Child of the Jago*, which sets the 1896 starting date, to Nigel Fountain's *Days like These* (1985). Beckett (*Murphy*), Ballard, Elizabeth Bowen, Colin McInnes, Graham Greene, Patrick Hamilton, rub shoulders promiscuously. This London is all alternative and for ever somehow post-war — an impression backed up by stills from films like *Dulcimer Street*, based on Norman Collins's 1945 novel *London Belongs to Me*, Maureen Duffy's trilogy — *Wounds* (1969), *Capital* (1975), *Londoners* (1983) — looks suddenly at home, a fitting reflection on a culture all low life and high-rise with no middle ground. In the catalogue, Ms Duffy writes of the metropolis as "the great mother... that nourishes all who write about her and out of her, even though sometimes the milk is sour skin..."

The Bookspace itself has an uncertain, makeshift air, of course: the new South Bank board, due to take over from the GLC on April 1, let it be known before the opening in November that they regarded it as space wasted, and intended to turn it back into a (sponsorship) restaurant for concerts. Its manager, Rosemary Stones, has been canvassing support, and has assembled an impressive list of well-wishers. However, perhaps her best piece of evidence that Bookspace really does stand for something is the response from Kingsley Amis to her appeal, which goes like this:

Dear Mrs Stones,
Thank you for your letter about Bookspace. I am afraid that, as you describe it, the project seems to me absolutely horrifying and directly counter to what I take to be the interests of literature. I undertake not to work actively to destroy it but I cannot possibly give you my support. I am sorry.
Yours sincerely...

Was it the tribute to Christopher Isherwood, the Lesbian Celebration, or the exhibition of Children's Books for a Multi-Racial Society? Or the prospect of a Tribute to Geoffrey Grigson (coming up on March 7)? Or Non-Sexist Storytelling (March 8)? Surely not a Day of Calligraphy (March 12)? The new board, it's rumoured, is thinking of squeezing Bookspace into a quiet corner in whatever South Bank location it finds for the Arts Council's Poetry

AUTHOR, AUTHOR

Competition No 267:
Readers are invited to identify the sources of the three quotations which follow and to send us the answers so that they reach this office not later than March 21. A prize of £20 is offered for the first correct set of answers opened on that date, or falling that the most nearly correct — in which case inspired guesswork will also be taken into consideration.
Entries, marked "Author, Author 267" on the envelope, should be addressed to the Editor, *The Times Literary Supplement*, Priory House, St John's Lane, London EC1M 4BX. The solution and results will appear on March 28.

1 'The murmur of the awakening sea doth fill
The empty paces of the blast: — the hill
Looks honey through the white electric rain,
And from the glass beyond, in sudden strain
The interrupted thunder howls above
One chain of Heaven smiles, like the eye of Love
On the unquiet world.'

2 Her information various + her eye watchful in
minutest observation of nature — and her taste of
perfect electrometer — it bends, protrudes, and draws
in, at subtle beauties & most recondite faults. — She
with her Brother desire their kindest respects to you.

Library, but meanwhile it is to be found on level three at the Royal Festival Hall.

Company Archives by Lesley Richmond and Bridget Stockford (Gower Publishing) is the result of a five year research project for the Business Archive Council (with support from the Economic and Social Research Council), devoted to tracking down the records of the oldest surviving limited companies in England and Wales. Survival, it turns out, is not exactly the prerogative of the fittest in the sense one might expect — first because many companies have changed their nature (for example, from steel to property), and second, because many of those who registered after 1856 were clubs and associations, spreading the liability for their premises: the Society of Authors, the BMA, Liberal clubs and bowling clubs and the Guild of St George, set up to follow the teachings of John Ruskin, these have often survived *in situ*, in prime sites in the middle of cities, because their shareholding is so dispersed no one can sell them.

Ms Richmond and Ms Stockford found quantities of material that no one knew existed, in basements and attics, and ended up with 670 companies, and findings that should interest all sorts of economic, social and local historians. There are the records on Boots the Chemist, brewers (Bass, Courage), and banks of course, but also altogether odder companies, whose history is often the history of a town, like the Tollesbury and Mersea Native Oyster Fishery Company, or John Boyd and Company in Somerset, the only horsehair weavers left, who nowadays export to France, Germany and Japan. Often there are staff records, and photographic collections. Among many surprises were the records of Shipping Clubs and Mutual Societies covering insurance; in Liverpool the researchers discovered previously unknown insurers of the Titanic, who still have personal information on the passengers.

Martin Secker and Warburg Limited, who have recently been in trouble for taking ungenerously advantage of the departure of their advisory editor Anthony Thwaite to ditch parts of their poetry list ("The turbulent priest is gone, dissolve the monastery" is how one victim, Alan Brownjohn, describes the move) are launching out in other directions. The editor responsible for the rude reformation, Robin Robertson, is starting *Mercury*, "a twice yearly collection of new international writing" with an emphasis on fiction, and interviews — and (some) poetry. The idea is to publish young writers, and unfamiliar ones, alongside established names (compare *Granta*, or Penguin's *Firebird* anthologies which were previously edited by Robertson) and to create a "flagship" for Secker, for Secker most of the small magazines around as "motoring in one way or another", and means — by pricing *Mer-*

cury at £3.95 — to take advantage of that. The launch date will be March 1987, and submissions (with return postage, about which they're very particular) should be addressed to *Mercury*, Martin Secker and Warburg Ltd, 54 Portland Street, London W1V 3DP.

The National Book League's latest survey of Library Book and Periodicals Spending in universities, polytechnics and colleges for 1984-1 makes predictably gloomy reading: "The amount spent on books and periodicals has fallen by a fifth. In terms of books alone real expenditure is down by a third since 1978." Libraries were meant to be protected from cuts, but (given the escalating costs of paper and binding — "hard copy" for short) have not been. During the 1970s the effects of declining funding were to some extent concealed by increased use of inter-library loans, using the recently renamed British Library Document Supply Service, but though its name has got longer and more industrial-sounding, its resources are shrinking too. John Davies, director of the University, College and Professional Publishers Council, says the statistics spell "disaster for higher education and disaster for academic publishing". Particularly, as the survey makes clear, in the case of books — standing orders, the difficulties of cancellation and the sheer volume of new journals mean that books are increasingly squeezed, and now account for less than half of expenditure in most places (this is known in the trade jargon as "creeping virement"). As a result, acquisitions policy has become ever more selective and/or chaotic — most libraries don't have enough specialists on the staff to do the selecting, or to move from one era of accumulation to one of rigorous choice.

Perhaps as a consequence of this, librarians are inclined to be sceptical of the outrageousness of the National Book League's pamphlets: they think academic publishers over-published, buoyed up by being able to produce ahead, and (increasingly) sell abroad, often to the same Third World countries. They point out too that copyright legislation designed to catch pirates in that market has academic libraries hard. And then there's the question of the arbitrariness of the mark-up on the (very large) proportion of material coming from the USA. Publishers too, are accused of dragging their feet on rationalization — isolating "key" articles and collecting them, for instance. Again, the NBL survey makes little reference to new technology — perhaps because embryo projects for electronic publications (like the picture-essay named *Adonis*) aren't coming quickly to birth. The income from "hard copy" is certain, whereas the electronic publisher doesn't know in advance how many searches of his data base people are going to make. In practice though, however you look at it, the book is a problem, and is likely to remain the handiest information pack (portable, flexible, and to the fury of librarians who can write in it) into the next century, which brings one back to the League's diagnosis of "disaster".

SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS ON

The TLS of March 2, 1911, carried a review of Arnold Bennett's novel The Card, from which these extracts are taken:

In his really big novels *The Old Wives' Tale* and *Clayhanger*, for instance, Mr Arnold Bennett's confident admirers feel that he is writing and only for themselves, but for posterity. Taste may change, of course, and these rigorously biographic presentations may give place to a form of literature not quite so firmly attached to life's exacting apron-strings. But even if Mr Bennett's masterpieces that would die of neglect. He writes another kind of book, such as *The Card*, in his spare time, as it were. And here life is slightly, dexterously disrupted. Coincidence plucks softly at the strings. By hook or by crook we are going to be kept very lively and agog. *The Card*, indeed, is a kind of fairy-tale — a fairy-tale told in terms of the Five Towns. Denry (a maternal variant of Edward Henry) is the only character that much matters. Mr Bennett even in his spare time, even when he is merely a markedly clever narrator of himself, is an artist.

Letters

Word Technology

Sir, — Peter Jay states ("The Writing on the Screen", February 21), "*Pride and Prejudice* [ie, any work of literature] is necessarily a composition, almost necessarily a work of writing. It is only a book because of the crude and artistically neutral facts of word technology over the last 175 years." He goes on to ask us that should we doubt this and be unable to rid ourselves "of the habitual prejudices of a print-dependent culture" we should buy and listen to Irene Sutcliffe's rendering of *Pride and Prejudice* on cassette. "You are actually, especially if you are busy and drive about or work with your hands, more likely to reread it, if you do it in this way."

This is a remarkable passage — it lets the cat out of the bag neatly. Mr Jay talks of the economics of printing, the possibility of shifting a print culture to more technological alternatives. However, it's only this concrete suggestion — possibility — that shows just what a fallacy his vision is. It is nice to know we can listen to *Pride and Prejudice* when we are busy, ie, have "better" things to do. Perhaps we can have Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* while we're in the bath and Eliot's poetry on a cassette player in the garden. Then we won't need to think, even notice what the book's words are actually getting at. We shall have an eternity of seemingly "light murmuring chat" like music in the background, and need only give a tiny section of our mind to it.

Reading isn't easy — but perhaps Jay ought to ask why, despite the increasing technological alternatives, books still remain solidly our main source of information and culture. Maybe it isn't just that we're still not quite ready to leap into the brave new world of recorded writing. And even if we were, maybe writing, the written word's place in history alone, the fact that it, distinct from any other form, has been the vehicle of so much of human culture and ideas, will make us reluctant to change over even if we were technically able to. There are real differences between written words and spoken ones, among them practical matters like the fact that one can go over a passage again at one's own pace (not at a reader's), as well as deeper ones. A book is not just a book because of crude technology. If we hear Miss Sutcliffe read *Pride and Prejudice* we hear her voice, her interpretation, at her speed. We also have to change, subtly, from being accustomed to the mental activity involved in reading words on a page, to that of listening, which makes different demands.

This is a profound re-adaptation, one Jay does not even mention in his article. It is, after all, only in how it serves and gives expression to the human mind that any form of communication is valuable, and we would be throwing away a great deal of our individual freedom and our history in crossing over to a cassette-based, or video-based, or whatever, form of culture.

K. A. BROWN.

The Old Barn, High Street, Yalding, Kent.

Disease and the Novel

Sir, — I often disagree with Arthur Kleinman (Letters, January 31) who, while he may well have less experience in matters literary than Iain McGilchrist, is (unfortunately?) less easily dismissed as a physician, a psychiatrist, an anthropologist and a scholar of Chinese life and medicine. It is petty to suggest his experience stops short at the door of the Harvard Anthropology Department, itself no mean feat of learning. It is even pettier to focus a criticism of his views on his use of American medical language, which, unusual as it may appear to readers of the TLS, he did not invent and which, despite what may seem to some its inaccuracy, may have a certain clarity to those who trouble to learn it, or even to read his letter with more care. He was precisely trying to distinguish between biological disease and psychological illness, the aspect of ill-health which has subjective meaning for the patient and his family. As a practising physician, he is as aware as is McGilchrist of the physical reality of the pathological. Some of us have been using him for some time to add another category, namely sickness which describes and analyses the way in which, in different societies and groups, ill-health is legitimately perceived.

Indeed, these two contenders appear from the outside to have much in common. The one appears to see in novels only the development of individual character; the other focuses his study of illness largely on individuals and their dyadic relationships. Certainly, no one who reads Professor Kleinman's anthropological work, or that of his students and colleagues, could share McGilchrist's illusion that anthropologists deal with types, unlike novelists and doctors who "must" be concerned with individuals (an All Souls view of the former and a teaching-hospital view of the latter).

McGilchrist in his original review (December 13) and in his rejoinder (Letters, February 14) is full of surprises to a medical anthropologist with an amateur's interest in English literature. It may be true that English novels are rarely centred on sickness, but they are by no means empty of references to it. Dickens and Conrad are full of chronic disability, if not of disease in a strict sense; I wish I could describe the relationships between patients, sickness and their healers one half so well as George Eliot at length, or even Jane Austen in passing.

I am surprised, too, that a disillusioned literary critic wishing to understand the relationships between mind and body should turn first to the study of medicine and disease. Nursing would surely have afforded him more continuous and direct contact with the sick (as against their diseases). He has certainly quickly mastered the culture of countering all criticism of medical practice by what we have learnt to call shroud-waving, exemplifying disease not by common, but by extreme, example.

Finally in the short, and I am afraid inglorious, period of my life when I too was a medical student, I did manage to learn at the feet of Lord Cohen of Birkenhead that pathology was real but that diseases were indeed social constructs to be regarded with suspicion by the physician who had ambitions to emulate his success as the great diagnostician of his day, as well as by patients, properly fearful of being prematurely labelled and thence improperly treated.

RONALD FRANKENBERG.

Centre for Medical Social Anthropology, University of Keele, Staffordshire.

Mensa

Sir, — I have only just seen your issue of February 14. As a member of Mensa I would like to comment on the very misleading picture both of the organization and of Victor Serebriakoff's book *Mensa* presented by Adrian Woolridge's somewhat ill-natured review.

Roland Berrill certainly was eccentric, and being, as Serebriakoff puts it, "deficient in normal scepticism" and "a sucker for far-out and cranky beliefs", he felt for phrenology, palmistry, astrology, Dianetics, etc. As an individual he was of course free to take an interest in such matters, just as Mensa members are today, but he suggested that they were accepted by Mensa as a whole, and exploited the publicity that Mensa was beginning to attract to put forward his own odd views. Serebriakoff makes it clear that this was much disproved of by other early members, so Adrian Woolridge's picture of them discussing astrology, Dianetics, etc at meetings is false and is refuted by the book itself.

It was these problems which led Serebriakoff to devise what became Mensa's most important precept: that Mensa as a body has no views, that nothing is ever put forward as the opinion of Mensa as a whole, and that anything said by any member can only be taken as that individual's personal view. It applies to this letter — and to Serebriakoff's book. He is one of the sanest and most tolerant people I have ever met, and for Woolridge to call him "cranky and cantankerous", supporting this by latching on to his brief joking reference to the problem Mensa might face in handling an application from an intelligent machine and transmitting it into an assertion that he is much exercised by the problem of whether to admit such machines, is quite disgraceful.

Berrill is long dead and it is obvious that his idea of Mensa as a panel of the intellectually gifted who could be consulted by government was a non-starter. Mensa has found its true role as a social organization, bringing together

many who, but for it, would certainly have never met. It has had many problems, and there have been members whose only aim was to make trouble, but the worst times are long past, and it is to Serebriakoff's credit that he is so frank about them. It now has the strength of numbers to overwhelm the tiny minority of bothersome misfits and, contrary to the image of it sometimes presented in the media, is a warm and welcoming body, as I have found over thirteen years of membership.

RAY WARD.
7 Saunders Road, Sheffield.

The Sacco-Vanzetti Case

Sir, — David Felix is perfectly right (Letters, February 21). I did use the words "revolver" and "pistol" carelessly, and ignorance may explain, but cannot excuse, these slips. I shall be more careful next time.

The rest of his letter hardly deserves notice. I am glad to hear that he still thinks so well of his own book, and gladder yet to learn that Francis Russell is about to bring out another book on the Sacco-Vanzetti case. But was it quite right of Mr Felix to give us the gist of Russell's book before it has come out? His puff for it does nothing to strengthen his own assertions, and rubs a little gloss off Russell's novelty.

HUGH BROGAN.
Department of History, University of Essex,
Wivenhoe Park, Colchester, Essex.

'The Strachey Line'

Sir, — Your reviewer of Barbara Strachey's *The Strachey Line* (February 7) states: "The first William Strachey was shipwrecked in 1609 in the Caribbean, on his way to Virginia..." This would argue either a monstrous error in navigation or a considerable perversity in the choice of route. In fact the reference is to the wrecking of the Sea Venture on the islands of Bermuda — which are quite a long way away from the Caribbean, and much closer to the direct route from England to Virginia. This shipwreck led not only to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* but also to the settling of Bermuda.

The remains of this early victim of the "Bermuda Triangle" have recently been discovered and excavated. The first part of Jonathan Adams's report on the excavation of the wreck has just been published in the *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology*.

D. J. LYON.
6 Heverham Road, Plumstead, London SE18.

Boccaccio's 'Decameron'

Sir, — Thank you for listing my book, *Religion and the Clergy in Boccaccio's 'Decameron'* (January 31). It wasn't "posthumously published", though — both myself and the Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura are still in quite good health. Any readers curious to discover how the misunderrated arose may purchase their copies through Boydell and Brewer, the British distributors of the book, at £15. They should read with particular care as far as the preface. After that, they can relax.

CORMAC Ó CUILLÉANÁIN.
Department of Italian, Trinity College, Dublin.

Enclaves

Sir, — According to Peter Kemp (Commentary, January 10) Radio 4's *The Great Canadian Novel* left him with the sense that Canada is virtually devoid of cities. According to his reading of Mordecai Richler, who evidently wasn't referred to, there are French-Canadian "enclaves" in Montreal. That's as good as finding American enclaves in New York.

JAMES BRIERLEY.
578 Lansdowne Avenue, Montreal.

Oscar Wilde

Sir, — In H. R. Woudhuysen's account of a sale at the Bloomsbury Book Auctions (February 21) he says that there was sold "what appeared to be a presentation copy from Oscar Wilde to his wife Constance of a copy of his *Poems*, Paris 1903". Appearances can be deceptive. Wilde died in 1900.

PATRICK TAYLOR.
Beaumont House, New Street, Wells, Somerset.

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Basil Blackwell

108 Cowley Road, Oxford OX4 1JF
Route 1695, 424 Park Avenue South, New York NY 10016

COMMENTARY

Versions of pastoral

Peter Kemp

Bookmark: R. S. Thomas
BBC2

Trees are the most deep-rooted symbols in the poetry of R. S. Thomas. Time after time, in his earlier verse, the gnarled, stunted trunks dotting the Welsh hill country are made to stand as emblems of the region's sparse rural populace: in-grown, weathering harsh conditions, clinging to a sour soil. At the heart of his religious meditations looms, as another image of painful perseverance, "The tree with the body / on it".

One reason why Thomas has been so gripped by the notion of arboreal endurance – it seemed from *Bookmark's* survey of his work and world – is that he himself was transplanted: plucked from a sheltered bourgeois background and plunged as a young priest into the raw immediacy of a remote farming community in Montgomeryshire. Combining extracts from a 1963 film of him in this environment with its own chilly evocation of it, *Bookmark* took you on a brisk, bleak tour of an area whose mouldering relics of an older way of life Thomas's best verse documents with such brooding intensity. Constantly, what was heard and seen turned your thoughts back to his poetry. Hearing him speak – as the camera tracked a cow-man slopping through the slurry – of his initial shocked revulsion from the muck and mucus of farming life reminded you how, in stanzas spattered with spittle, phlegm and filth, his Christian pastorship often reels under his recoil from people he sees as near-brutish creatures, reeking of stale sweat and animal contact. Shots of desolate farms crouched under the lee of bare hills and lowering skies

recalled those depicted in his most durable poems – decrepit shelters of a vestigial peasantry or derelict shells with grass, not moss, streaming from their chimneys. The only other buildings discernible in his rural distances – churches – were also toured by the film. Stony and under-populated as the hills around them, they were redolent of the damp vestries, mildewed cassocks, cold wine and guttering candles Thomas records in his pungently parochial verses.

Thomas's religious attitudes were outlined by several speakers on the programme. None mentioned his early dark biblical vision, though the way he had added sombreness to parish services was remarked on disapprovingly by one of his churchwardens: "He repainted inside the church. The pews and the organ, the pulpit, was then light oak. But now he painted 'em all this dull black." Thomas "was never to feel comfortable with his parishioners", the programme observed. One contributor suggested that he felt less and less comfortable with Christianity, having strayed towards a kind of cosmic mysticism. Another speaker alluded to Thomas's phase of commitment to the concept of a scientific God, adding that this had given rise to some outstanding poetry: a contention which Thomas's verse of that period – with its junior science-kit talk of "flasks and test-tubes" or sending "probes" into "the God space" – leaves distinctly disputable. In a poem he read as the programme ended, Thomas gave another twist to his religious position by speaking of being "too pusillanimous" to doubt. Other poems intimate that his religion has much in common with those Welsh fastnesses he's devoted to, being lonely, clouded, and offering only precarious sustenance.

Latterly, Thomas's fervour seems largely to have dedicated itself to proselytizing for Welsh nationalism and the revival of the Welsh language. He was, explained his churchwarden – who was "pulled up over it with him once in the Post Office for asking for a postal order for 12s 6d in English" – "a bit of a Welsh fanatic". One poem cited in the programme ("I . . . sucked their speech / in with my mother's / infected milk, so that whatever / I throw up now is still theirs") testified to the sick distaste Thomas



"L'italienne" by Pablo Picasso, 1953 – a lithograph made on the discarded zinc of a poster bearing a commercial photo-screened image. It can be seen at an exhibition of rare and important prints at Weddington Graphics, 4 Cork Street, London W1X 1PA, until March 27.

A professional amateur

Richard Langham Smith

ADRIAN MITCHELL
Satie: Day/Night
Lyric Studio, Hammersmith

Take the dullest actor you can find, dress him up in a drab grey suit and get him to recite – in the style of a press-association telex – the facts of Erik Satie's life. You would still keep the coolest of audiences amused for a good hour. Spice it with some of his writings and you could keep them for two. Add a smattering of his universally appealing music, and there would be more than enough for a full soirée.

Sylvester McCoy as Satie, and Michael Attwell as the various characters who impinge upon his life, are by no means dull actors (although they are not much good at the songs). Nor is Adrian Mitchell's piecing together of the rich inheritance of Satie's eminently translatable writings a hasty patchwork. This touching and amusing show, well-suited to the intimate surroundings of the Lyric Studio, is skilfully assembled and its juxtapositions of words and music enhance our viewpoint on this fascinating and attractive man.

"Don't ask me to be serious," says Satie at one point. "It hurts too much." This is one of quite a number of glimpses into why Satie remained a gentle joker all his life: "You're a booby," says his father, "and when you grow up you're going to be a big booby." Whether his father really said this or not, never mind. Mitchell may take liberties, but it works. Satie's relationship with his Uncle Seabird, from whom he seems to have inherited his sense of humour, is underlined by Mitchell. This character is the first to appear in the broadly chronological biography on which the evening is based. He has a boat which once went out to sea. But, he says, the sea behaved awfully badly so now he keeps it by the shore, paints it once a year, and puts it every day. Inventive continuity links biography with quotations from Satie's writings, and a couple of slapstick scenes (import such colourful cabaret figures as Rodolphe Salis, the insulting master of ceremonies at the celebrated Chat Noir).

More to the point is Mitchell's marriage of music to memoir. In particular, we are given recurrent episodes of a Hans Christian Andersen fairy-tale accompanied by a haunting piece entitled "Enfantine Pittoresque". Satie's uncle first reads him the story, snapping about the book at a crucial moment. The same tale is continued as a shadow play, the screen images (by Tom Phillips) letting us into the secrets of the Chat Noir. The same story is taken up by several other visitors, pressed into reading this, the one volume from Satie's "library". There can be few more appropriate ways of appreciating the man and his music than by these juxtapositions of well-chosen words and piano pieces.

"Enfantine pittoresque" really sums it all up.

Strange meetings

Roger Cardinal

Georges Braque: Illustrations to Poems by Guillaume Apollinaire
Library Art Gallery, University of Surrey

First published in their entirety in 1955 under the title *Poèmes à Lou*, Apollinaire's most erotic cycle of poems was inspired by his torrid liaison with Louise de Colligny-Châtillon, which took place in the brief interval in late 1914, between his enlistment in the artillery and his departure for the front line. Largely composed as appendices to love-letters written at Nîmes before Apollinaire even saw the trenches, the poems reveal some odd physical and psychological tensions: they are an eccentric amalgam of explicit sexual fantasies and a celebration of modern warfare seen almost as a superior firework performance; and they range in tone between elegiac poignancy and flippancy. As a cycle, they reflect a strange process of imagining, enumerating both the features of a desired female body and the scarcely less erotically charged features of a fantastic battlefield, lit up by cannon-fire and probing searchlights. Although Georges Braque was no longer a close friend of Apollinaire's by the time the

Debussy's introduction into the proceedings shows us the differences between Satie and what he saw as the opposing world of successful composition, Debussy appears in a dotty Seurat jacket, playing the role of the old Impressionist who has made his money out of what, by the twentieth century, was old hat. Debussy himself wrote a "Children's Corner", but it was for adults to look back on their childhood. Satie's infantile pieces – best demonstrated in a sequence from the "Sports et Divertissements" where the commentaries are intoned through a megaphone and simultaneously mimed – show us the grown-up in whom the child obstinately insists on retaining the upper hand.

Clare Sutherland adeptly adds two more

hands to the proceedings, playing on a candleabra-adorned upright piano which perfectly captures the spirit of this professional amateur. In reality, Satie had a little more to say than the evening suggests. A period of Rosenkranz is totally ignored, as are the late collaborations with the Ballets Russes. Where was Cocteau and the new world of mechanism and cinema that replaced the Impressionist fog? Perhaps this, the world of *Parade*, is a side of Satie's piano alone could never capture.

Rollo H. Myers's *Erik Satie*, the first English study of the composer, his life, music and writings, has recently been reissued in paperback (150pp. Dover/Constable. £4.50, 0 486 21980 8). The book was first published in 1948.

Despite the poignancy of the gesture of illustrating the work of a long-dead composer in arms, Braque's adherence to the mood and impact of the actual texts seems little more than formal. His suavely tinted prints, comprising such well-remembered motifs as flowers and birds on the wing, tend to come across as cool, even urbane when set alongside the smouldering densities and wayward gasping of the poetry. Nevertheless, some prints enter into pleasurable resonance with the text, as when lines about veiled women blurring the mist past the Luxembourg fountain give rise to an image of a black bird (of a black cat) hovering ethereally over a pond. And there are elsewhere examples of aesthetic points that we, as viewers, can justify, and a general feeling of calm or chasteness that some may want to take as an old man's legitimate reply to Apollinaire's obsession with breasts and excrement.

The exhibition will be at the Art House Gallery, Southport, from March 15 to April 15. From there it will go to Halifax, Bangor, Bath, Hereford, Birmingham and York.

Planning the way we live

Andrew Saint

FRANK JACKSON
Sir Raymond Unwin: Architect, planner and visionary
192pp. Zwemmer. £12.50.
0 302 00591 9

Raymond Unwin probably changed more people's lives for the better than any other British architect or planner. So bald a claim is nowhere made in Frank Jackson's exemplary short biography, but it is there by implication and might as well be stated simply. By force of circumstance, idealism and hard work, Unwin was able to go a long way towards realizing the reformer's dream of raising the standard of home and environment for the mass of the population. Other modern planners (Geddes, Mumford, Le Corbusier, Jane Jacobs) have been more eloquent or charismatic; none has been more beneficially productive.

At the end of his life Unwin once described himself as an "interpreter", Jackson tells us. That is an apt name for him. His career followed a pattern almost classic for an Edwardian social reformer, his father having been an impoverished Oxford don who had "doubts". Unwin himself started out in 1886 as a draughtsman-engineer in a cotton mill, by which time he had read Henry George, met Edward Carpenter, was running the Manchester branch of Morris's Socialist League and writing for *Commonweal*. News from Nowhere first appeared in *Commonweal*, so the link between utopian and practical planning was a direct one.

Forty years later Unwin was a civil servant in the Ministry of Health, scheming in Fabian fashion to get the broad principles he had learnt in the 1880s established in public housing. In between came the planning schemes for which he is most remembered: New Earswick, the Rowntrees' model suburb outside York;

Letchworth Garden City; and Hampstead Garden Suburb. All these were matured during a nineteen-year partnership with his cousin Barry Parker who, one may presume, kept his nose to the drawing-board while Unwin promoted and interpreted the ideas. But it seems likely that Parker's skills in designing Voysey-esque houses for Midlands businessmen had much to do with establishing Unwin's confidence. On the strength of these early houses the partners published *The Art of Building a Home*, a somewhat sentimental production. There followed the robust Fabian pamphlet *Cottage Plans and Common Sense* (1902), New Earswick, and Unwin's practical involvement in the Garden City movement.

Though the story of the garden city and suburb is well told, it does not dominate the biography. Unwin, Jackson makes clear, was a firm Georgeite, a co-operator and an admirer of Ebenezer Howard, but he by no means agreed with every principle of Howard's Garden City Association. At Letchworth he united Howard's large-scale ideas about land-ownership, town-size, zoning and environment with studies of his own on cottage planning, plot densities, and the aesthetics of small houses. None of this was wholly new. Bernard Shaw dismissed Howard's utopia as "the same old vision", and a minor shortcoming of this book is that it fails to sort out the rather complex history of British cottage planning around this time. Nevertheless Unwin was the first to bring these ideals and experiments together and make them work. But he was too realistic to regard the garden city as a sufficient end. His classic *Town Planning in Practice* and the influential pamphlet *Nothing Gained by Overcrowding* (which showed that a low-density street-pattern with ample gardens and open space could be as cheap as a "byelaw"-type layout) were attempts to show that the best of garden-city experience could be universally available.

It was this Fabian urge to make social improvement nationally available which induced

Unwin to desert private practice for the Civil Service in 1914. The latter half of the book contains a lucid account of Unwin's much less well-known later career. He was the first architect of stature to join modern government service in Britain and his influence, not just upon the physical environment but also upon the structure of British architecture and planning, was immense. As the Ministry of Health's Housing Architect, he had a decisive impact upon the shape and scale of public housing after 1918. Like most wise housing reformers he had reservations about council housing, but he judged it better to improve and control the inevitable than to argue for the impossible. Unwin was also the practical father of concerted building research in Britain. He took the decisive steps towards establishing the green belt around London, laid down the principles from which the post-war new towns policy derived and communicated the experience of the halcyon years of British planning far and wide, particularly in America.

What is there to be said against Unwin? Like most of Morris's disciples, he was too much in love with the countryside, too inclined to think of the big city as irredeemable; he therefore saw things instinctively in terms of nature and "the home". Yet the sprawl of the inter-war suburbs happened because stupid governments ignored his principles, not because they adopted them, while houses built since 1918, private or public, have been immeasurably the better for his work. Like all English advocates of decanting population from the great conurbations, he had no convincing answers, physical, economic or social, to the issues of the inner city. Frank Jackson is at some pains to dissociate him from the next generation of British architects and planners, yet in many ways they followed him all too faithfully. While admiring Letchworth it is as well also to remember Toxteth and Brixton. But the success and good sense of the Unwinian model are far from sufficient reasons for the failures of modern inner-city policy.

Custom-built classicism

Clive Aslet

LUCY ARCHER
Raymond Erith: Architect
231pp. The Cynnet Press, Burford,
Oxfordshire. £19.50.
0 9074 3504 1

It comes as a particular delight that such a large, beautiful and classically designed book should have been produced on Raymond Erith, so much of whose time was devoted, as his daughter Lucy Archer puts it, to "fanning the smouldering flame of classicism" in the 1930s and 60s. Legend has it that he was an architectural Cinderella, and to some degree this is true. His name was well known and his point of view respected in the profession; but that was partly because his colleagues did not regard him as a threat. When it came to finding work, or, having found it, convincing planning committees that his designs should be built, he found himself frustrated, time and again. He once wrote that if he did not build something he would burst. Despite it all, as this book admirably shows, he actually succeeded in building rather a lot.

On the whole the big commissions for universities, hospitals, office blocks, shopping centres and even cathedrals were denied him; they went to the Modernists. He was only honoured with the job of restoring and rebuilding those renowned Georgian town-houses, Nos 10-12 Downing Street, because of his acknowledged skill in handling old buildings; it was the kind of painstaking work that big commercial practices could not be bothered with. His large public works comprise the Wolfson building and library at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford; the common-room block at Gray's Inn; and that most fanciful of pubs, Jack Straw's Castle in Hampstead. Except for an imaginatively named factory and warehouse design for Soane's, however, his unbuilt projects suggest that he was not happiest on a large scale. He rightly described himself as a "real market-town architect". His genius was for country

houses, follies, gate-piers, garden buildings. And there was no shortage of private clients to employ him.

The book's short biographical prelude reveals Erith's engaging personality. Unlike his partner Quinlan Terry, who continues the practice, Erith the man was no puritan: he enjoyed foreign travel, fine wine and vintage cars. But, again unlike Terry, Erith the architect could not have been more austere. Oddly, his natural aesthetic instincts had much in common with the Modernists whose building methods he deplored. He would go back again and again to a design, to pare it down to the bones (by contrast Terry can never resist adding a finial). Another tenet that Erith shared with the Modernists was a belief in rationalism that ultimately harked back to the Gothic Revival. He eschewed symmetry if he believed the plan required him to.

His career started with a flourish when, in 1933, with his then partner Bertram Hume, he won a much reported international competition to re-plan part of Stockholm. Then, six years later, he was commissioned to build gates, cottages and gate-lodges at Royal Lodge, Windsor. Since these buildings were for the king they should have established his reputation as an architect for country estates. But they were bombed a mere two weeks after completion, and perhaps they had been too austere for royal taste. For when they were rebuilt after the war it was to another architect's designs and in a more obviously winning, indeed winsome, Regency style. "The effect", comments Mrs Archer, "was to delay his really productive career by about fifteen years."

The second section of the book is a compilation of Erith's occasional writing and speeches. This is intended to give an impression of what the book on architectural theory, which Erith thought of writing but never did, would have been like. It covers his early admiration for Soane, his understanding of Alberti, what he meant by tradition, why Modernism was no good, the virtues of vernacular building, and his passionate fight to preserve Dedham Vale.

Being a farmer as well as an architect, he had a greater sympathy for the true spirit of Palladio than most eighteenth-century English Palladians.

What I want is the quality of Palladio's simpler country houses which were built for the landowner to go to in the summer, to see the harvest go in; unambitious country architecture which is architecture all the same.

Erith's excuse for not writing the book – given in a letter – was typical:

I have been looking at my Great Thoughts on the Theory of Architecture. They really ought to be worked up for publication. . . . But I have got to get the hay in and so I don't suppose I shall do anything. He was by nature a practical man, not a theorist.

The sections on his practice and the excellent list of works hold the real key to Erith's special quality. For the extracts from his long letters to clients show how he pondered and fretted over every detail of the building, generally accommodating the client's wishes or at least winning the client round to his point of view. Perhaps sometimes he worried too much. But the real beauty of an Erith building comes not just from its classical appearance but from its being ideally adapted in every particular to the wants of the people who live in it. Had he been busier, would he have had time to go on perfecting intimacy like this? The pity is that there were not more men like Erith.

In *Industrial Architecture in Britain 1750-1939* (239pp. Batsford. £25. 0 7134 2532 6), Edgar Jones focuses on "buildings which lay at the very core of the Industrial Revolution in Britain", particularly on mills, iron and steel works, engineering works, chemical plants and gasworks. The buildings are considered in the context of wider architectural trends, with some attention also paid to the influence on industrial architecture of developments in agriculture, transport, finance and commerce. The study is arranged chronologically, including chapters on "The pioneering phase", "Iron and romantic classicism", "The Gothic revival" and "The high Victorian movement".

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Developing debts

Darrell Delamaide

GRAHAM BIRD
World Finance and Adjustment: An agenda for reform
353pp. Macmillan. £27.50 (paperback, £9.95). 0333314778
ARMINGUTOWSKI, A. A. ARNAUDO and HANS-ECKART SCHARER
Financing Problems of Developing Countries
353pp. Macmillan. £35.
0333349903
RANDALL HINSHAW (Editor)
World Recovery without Inflation?
156pp. Johns Hopkins University Press. £17.60.
0801827647

The dilemma of economic development for countries in the Third World dominated the joint annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in Seoul last October. The United States Treasury Secretary, James Baker, announced a radical change in the policy of the Reagan Administration towards debt and development, calling on the commercial banks with the backing of the two Bretton Woods institutions to commit longer-term financing to developing countries.

Mr Baker's declaration indicated that the administration had realized that developing countries need to import capital if they are to continue to develop. They cannot, as they have done since Mexico suspended payments of principal in August 1982, become net exporters of capital, servicing debts contracted in the heady, inflationary 1970s. As Graham Bird explains in his *World Finance and Adjustment*:

By borrowing, countries are in effect trading off future domestic absorption, ie consumption and investment expenditure, in favour of current absorption. Borrowers are relaxing current constraints at the cost of imposing future ones Borrowing

initially allows investment to exceed domestic saving and imports to exceed exports. However, the crux of the debt problem is that in order to repay loans these inequalities have to be reversed to an extent and within a period of time determined by the conditions of the loans.

Mr Bird, course director in economics at the University of Surrey, intends this as a textbook, and it certainly has some salient lessons for American policy-makers. Indeed, his fresh and intelligent explanations can enlighten not only economics students, but anyone baffled by the course of the Third World debt. Unfortunately, as textbooks are wont to be, this one tends to be very dry and to require application. But Bird remains generally very clear, and although he expresses a definite point of view, is fair in his presentation of controversial subjects. In the end, his analysis anticipates the direction of international monetary reform. For instance, here is his clarification regarding economic adjustment (a term which too often is used superficially):

A further distinction needs to be made between *stabilization and adjustment*. The balance of payments may be stabilized through the suppression of import demand. Although the observed payments position may improve as a result of such policies, it does not necessarily follow that fundamental correction has taken place. Merely to deflate domestic aggregate demand until imports have been reduced to a total consistent with a given level of exports does not automatically constitute adjustment in the true sense of the word.

A lesson for the economists at the IMF? Bird's excessive preoccupation with the IMF's Special Drawing Rights (SDR) is perhaps one instance where he loses his sense of balance. For some reason, this artificial reserve created by the IMF has an irresistible fascination for professional economists. Meanwhile, the market and even central bankers and policy-makers have until now rejected the SDR. Yet the author, like other members of

the academic establishment, persists in ignoring another "cocktail currency" embraced by the market and already fulfilling many of the functions of a reserve currency—the European Currency Unit, or Ecu, as some Continental bankers like to style it.

Financing Problems of Developing Countries is a collection of papers presented in October 1981 in Buenos Aires. Inevitably, some of the content is of archival interest only, notably Francis X. Colago's introductory article with medium-term high and low-growth scenarios (and his astonishingly calm anticipation that the external debt of oil-importing less developed countries could top \$1,000 billion by the end of the decade). For the most part, the contributions, very academic in tone and often technical, remain quite useful. Among the several interesting papers on the role of domestic finance, Egon Kemes highlights the role of agriculture, while Alfredo J. Canavese and Luisa Montuschi provide a fascinating analysis of Argentina's ill-fated policy of import substitution. A critique of the original Brandt Commission report by Niels Thygesen, emphasizing the importance of exchange-rate stability and the vulnerability of commercial bank lending, was quite present in retrospect and still timely (as evidenced by the United States Congressional Summit Conference on exchange-rates in November).

Two outstanding pieces are Ronald I. McKinnon's discussion of "repressed" economies and Hazem El-Behawi's paper on OPEC's payments surpluses. McKinnon de-

velops his theme of a non-liberal economy, arguing that controlled domestic economies need the flanking measures of capital and exchange controls. Precipitous liberalization of the external economy can pose serious dangers for a non-liberal domestic economy (his analysis as applicable to Southern European countries as to many developing ones). El-Behawi, an Egyptian economics professor who works for a Kuwaiti bank, claims that OPEC's surpluses were invested in financial assets which were not backed by a corresponding growth in real assets, with the result that they contributed only to increasing inflation, which in turn eroded the value of those assets. He concludes that the investments in Western financial institutions were thus riskier than direct investment in real assets in developing countries would have been.

World Recovery without Inflation?, edited by Randall Hinshaw, is the product of another symposium—this one at the Bologna Centre, Johns Hopkins University in May 1983. Rather than presenting formal papers, though, the twenty-one participating economists—among them Robert Triffin, Lord Kaldor and Robert Mundell—engaged for two days in a wide-ranging discussion, of which this is the transcript. While it lacks the rigour and depth of the formal papers, it makes for lively reading, rather like an exhibition tennis match. In addition to the intermittently substantive comment, the interaction and repartee preserved in the transcript give some insight into how the minds of economists work.

Underground movements

Stephen Aris

INGO WALTER
Secret Money: The world of international financial secrecy
213pp. Allen and Unwin. £11.95.
0043321070

Money is a subject about which the truth is often hard to come by. Husbands have been known to conceal their earnings from their wives; colleagues often lie to each other about their salaries; and the number of people who feel morally obliged to render an exact account to the Inland Revenue is probably quite small, if a recent survey in *The Times* is anything to go by. And the further up the scale you go, the greater the premium on secrecy. There are businessmen who practise "creative accounting" (a polite term for cooking the books); and in the City certain merchant banks have been known to publish fictitious profit figures.

And all this is only part of the picture. Higher up the scale still, whole industries and economies are fuelled by secret money and by undetected and unmeasurable economic activity. Switzerland is a case in point. With few natural assets, the Swiss have quite deliberately and very successfully set out to market secrecy as a commercial commodity. In his *Secret Money*, Ingo Walter quotes the German magazine, *Der Spiegel*, as saying that the amount of "flight capital" in Swiss banks in 1984 amounted to 100 billion Swiss francs.

Switzerland is not the only example. In Britain the existence of a secret, non-tax-paying "black" economy has helped to alleviate the impact of mass unemployment and has masked the true extent of our industrial and economic decline. And even in law-abiding West Germany, tax evasion is, it seems, on the increase. According to an unnamed source quoted by Professor Walter, some 1,500 million marks dividend payments escape the taxman's net each year. Where this money goes to is anybody's guess but the assumption is that much of it finds a safe haven abroad. In 1983 America's Internal Revenue Service estimated that anything between \$20 and \$135 billion was illegally leaving the country for secret destinations abroad each year.

These are huge sums. But, as Walter points out, it is in the Third World that secret money really comes into its own. The underground economy of Peru accounts for 60 per cent of the country's GNP and is one of the largest in the

world. Half the Indian economy is underground and Poland, a Third-World economy, is all but name, would have collapsed long ago were it not for its "black" economy. Secret money need not necessarily be illegal. But often is. The money flows associated with prostitution, gambling and drug trafficking are enormous. Colombia's exports of marijuana and cocaine are worth £30 billion a year, a trade financed entirely in secrecy.

So, clearly, the relationship between money and secrecy is both important and extremely close. But so far it is a subject that has attracted the attention of journalists rather than economists. It is more fun to write an exposé of the adventures of a Robert Vesco than to try and measure secret money and assess its economic significance. Ingo Walter, Professor of Economics and Finance at the Graduate School of Business Administration of New York University, has taken on this daunting task. However, although the publisher claims that the author "lays bare the secrets of the secret [sic] world", his book contains little information that is not already available elsewhere.

Walter makes a valiant effort to bring some kind of order and coherence to a sprawling subject but the overall result is rather unimpressive. It is an uneasy mixture of academic theorizing and second-hand journalism. The central chapters consist of a somewhat pedestrian account of how secret money is bought and sold and the various uses to which it is put. This has been spiced with accounts of recent financial scandals culled from the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Washington Post*. There are guest appearances by many of the more notorious rogues of the past few years: Robert Vesco, Roberto Calvi and Michele Sindona. But the stories are familiar and have been better told elsewhere.

His basic thesis is simple enough: the secret money is a commodity, subject to the laws of supply and demand just like any other. That is self-evident. The problem facing the inquisitive economist is, as Walter himself admits, a fundamental lack of data. "In general," he says, "no one has even a remote idea of the size or direction of global secret money flows or of the identity of those involved. It is, however, possible to speculate."

On the wider social and political issues Professor Walter is equally tentative. "Would the world be better off without financial secrecy?" he asks, and replies: "The issue is sufficiently complex that such a question is impossible to answer."

A diplomat disillusioned

Lek Hor Tan

TRUONG NHU TANG
Journal of a Vietcong
350pp. Cape. £10.95.
0224028197

In 1979, Truong Nhu Tang's arrival in Paris as a political refugee caused quite a sensation. He had been a founding member of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (the NLF, commonly known as the Vietcong) and Minister of Justice of the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG). During the Vietnam war, he was almost as well known abroad as Mrs Nguyen Thi Binh, the PRG foreign minister. Like Mrs Binh, Mr Tang was an urbane and effective publicist of the Vietcong's cause, and a good diplomat.

Tang fled Vietnam among the "boat people" in the summer of 1978. After a short stay in a UN refugee camp in Indonesia, he was given political asylum in France. When he arrived, I was among the journalists who interviewed him at some length. His story was a sad and moving one. The strong nationalistic feeling and revolutionary zeal were still there, but col-

oured by bitter disillusionment and a sense of having been duped and betrayed. One of the questions we asked him was whether he was going to write a book about his life. After all, he was no ordinary Vietcong defector. He had been a militant non-communist nationalist who had known imprisonment and hardship, and who had fought against the French and later against the Americans. But in 1975, after the communist victory in the South, he found himself out of favour, his ideals and hopes shattered, in a socialist and unified Vietnam.

Journal of a Vietcong is about such bitter experience, and is written with a great deal of eloquence. The best parts are the anecdotes and thoughts on some of Tang's colleagues within the Vietcong leadership, many of whom, unbeknown to him, were secret members of the Vietnamese Communist Party in the North. In the preface, Tang writes that "the West knows extraordinarily little about the Vietcong: its plans, its difficulties—especially its inner conflict". This statement is arguable. It reflects, perhaps, more on Tang's own innocence or illusions about the Vietcong and their propaganda. For instance, the exact relations of the Vietcong with the Vietnamese Communist Party, their tactics and strategies in the

South, were readily available in US intelligence reports and analyses, and also in studies done by more sober Vietnam specialists. But those journalists who had made use of them in their writings were not popular; they were invariably accused by people in the Anti-War Movement as "apologists of US imperialism", and worse.

When the Paris Peace Agreement was signed in January 1973, some of us also felt that the various articles and clauses in the Agreement would not be worth the paper they were written on once the communists came to power in the South. The articles on "national concord and reconciliation", the sharing of power between the Communists, the PRG and the "independent forces", and the gradual and orderly reunification between the North and South, all seemed too good to be true. As things have turned out, the reunification took place fourteen months after the fall of Saigon. But according to Tang, the actual reunification took place (if not in name) immediately after April 1975, the date of the communist victory. The NLF and the PRG were unceremoniously buried and forgotten, as he puts it. The "independent forces" of the South were nowhere to be found.

Professor Nguyen Khac Vien, the best-known Party intellectual abroad, was to comment later that the "PRG was always simply a group emanating from the DRV (North Vietnam). If we had pretended otherwise for such a long period, it was because during the war we were not obliged to unveil our cards." On this point, Tang writes in his book:

Now with total power in their hands, the North Vietnamese began to show their cards in the most brutal fashion. They made it understood that the Vietnam of the future was a single monolithic bloc, collectivist and totalitarian, in which all the traditions and culture of the South would be ground and moulded by the political machine of the conquerors.

At one point, Tang (being a former PRG minister of justice) was also involved in formulating the policy of "re-education" of civil servants, military officers, intellectuals, writers and artists who had served the previous régime, which he thought was normal in the circumstances. These people were promised that the "re-education" programme would last only one month, then they would be allowed back to the society. Ten years later, thousands of them are still detained in labour camps. In what the Vietnamese émigrés call the "tropical gulag", without trial or appeal. Tang personally took his two brothers to such a camp and promised them that they would be home soon. To this day, one of them is still detained in North Vietnam. He is a doctor.

Like other non-communist leaders of the NLF and the PRG, Tang felt he had misled and betrayed members of his own family and friends and found it impossible to face them; some have committed suicide. In 1976, he retired to the country and waited for an opportunity to flee, though he thought his chance of survival would be slim. If he and his friends had been caught by the government patrol boats, they would have been shot or sent to long-term imprisonment. There were also the hazards of tropical storms and the pirates in the South China Sea. But when the time came they made it to Indonesia.

Brutalities of a world apart

Peter Carey

ANN LAURA STOLER
Capitalism and Confrontation in Sumatra's Plantation Belt, 1870-1979
240pp. Yale University Press. £22.
030031890

The plantation economy of Sumatra's East Coast (known to the Dutch as the *cultuurgebied*), first established in the 1870s, has always been something of a world apart in both colonial and post-Independence Indonesia. The contemporary Dutch writer, Rob Nieuwenhuis, has aptly described it as an "island" where everything had to be imported—the work-force (originally indentured labourers) from China and Java, the estate administrators from Europe, the "high-class" concubines from Japan, and the rice (to feed the burgeoning estate labour force) from Thailand. Fabled in its pre-twentieth-century heyday as the "Dollar Land of Deli", a place which produced some of the highest profits for Western capital of any colonial territory anywhere, it also became a byword for violence and exploitation—a brutal world where the life of the contract coolie was usually short and where the relationship between white employer and native labourer was unsoftened by any of the cultural constraints which operated in Java.

Although much has been written on the abuses of the "coolie contract" system, beginning with the passionate denunciations of the Dutch socialist, H. van Kol, before the First World War, and, more recently, by the Batak publisher, Mohammad Said, there have been no sustained studies of the relationship of power and production that structured the course of the *cultuurgebied*'s plantation economy over the past century. Ann Laura Stoler's work starts from the assumption that the forces of capitalism, as articulated in East Sumatra, cannot just be measured in terms of wage-labour relations and land appropriations; one has to look both at the contemporary contours of class and ethnic domination, and at the historical and ethnic context of East Sumatran plantation society. Well prepared by her extensive fieldwork on the survival strategies adopted by villagers in the poorer areas of Central Java in the early 1970s, Dr Stoler has managed to transfer her interest in things Javanese and the relationship between labour relations and community to the very different society of East Coast Sumatra. Her intimate knowledge of contemporary Central Javanese society has stood her in good stead throughout the present work, enabling her to make many effective cross-regional comparisons, and adding a certain depth to her contention that the relations in East Sumatra were never straightforward, but were always shaped by ethnicity, gender role, and the pressure of external events.

This is an interesting and valuable book, which, like a good East Sumatran novel, gets more credible as the plot unfolds. The introduction and early chapters on the dynamics of labour control and early twentieth-century protest movements among the plantation workers of the *cultuurgebied*, do not inspire much confidence. There is too much modish reference to gender hierarchies, and the "patron saints" of trendy left-wing historical analysis. The numerous subheadings in the third chapter on protest movements break the text down into segments which are too short for sustained analysis.

However, once Stoler gets on to describing the political and economic developments in the *cultuurgebied* during the Japanese occupation (1942-5) and the turbulent period of the Indonesian Revolution which followed (1945-9), her analysis gathers pace and conviction. She is especially good on the growth of the squatter movement and the establishment of the first trade union organizations among the estate workers. In particular the communist-affiliated SARBUPRI (*Sarekat Buruh Perkebunan Republik Indonesia*, Union of Indonesian Plantation Workers), which was all but destroyed in the aftermath of the alleged communist coup in 1965. This change in pace and quality of analysis is maintained in the final chapters. These deal with the blunting of trade union radicalism in the latter part of the 1950s as the massive Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) moved into political partnership with Sukarno, and as the nationalization of Dutch estates made the government in Jakarta ever more anxious to deflect workers' protests away from explicitly class issues into more harmless anti-Western xenophobia.

The final chapter in the book, based on Stoler's own fieldwork in the East Sumatran estates in 1977-9, is perhaps the most interesting of all, charting a society which has curiously come full-circle since the brash pioneering days of the 1870s. The old Dutch estate managers with their *jenever* and Japanese *Nyoi* (house-keepers) have gone, and in their place are members of the new Indonesian technocratic élite, often lording it in the same "Citizen Kane"-style administrator's bungalows surrounded by all the tawdry gadgetry of the new-rich (often supplied, along with local call-girls, by enterprising Chinese labour contractors). Batak and Malay assistant managers and clerks now occupy the positions once held by the Eurasian estate overseers, whereas out in the impoverished villages on the margins of the estates live a huge reserve army of day labourers, supposedly "free" to sell their labour power where they will but, in reality, just as dependent on the tyranny of the estates as their coolie-ancestor forefathers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The old dream of the colonial estate managers to have access to a captive labour force without any of the burdensome financial overheads of providing for medical care, accommodation and food, seems at last to have been realized. But the social cost has been very high: Stoler gives a vivid account of the brittleness of family structure which such a dependence on the estate sector necessitates, with an unusually large divorce rate, intra-family violence, strained adolescent-parent relations and a high incidence of prostitution. The chapter tells us much about the harsh realities of life in rural Indonesia today, where despite all the rhetoric about the "green revolution" and the benefits of the New Order government, the same exploitative relationships which disfigured the colonial past persist in different guise.

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Polynesian happenings

Peter Gathercole

MARSHALL SAHLINS
Islands of History
180pp. University of Chicago Press. £19.95.
0226 73572

One reviewer of an earlier essay by Marshall Sahlins dealing, as does much of this collection, with the first contact between Hawaiians and Captain Cook's Englishmen in 1778-9, commented with apparent surprise that the argument was so compelling that he wondered why he had not thought of it himself. These essays demonstrate the reasonableness of this seemingly naive remark. Sahlins has a formidable ability to take ideas, currently part of the working currency of his Polynesianist colleagues, and give them new cutting edges. In the past decade or so he has immersed himself in the historical sources concerning early contacts between, on the one hand, Hawaiians, Fijians and Maoris, and, on the other, the English. In *Islands of History* (the title, characteristically, is a multiple pun, reflecting both the numerous layered meanings the author brings to his argument and his sense of humour) Sahlins has brought together five recent lectures on ostensibly Polynesian themes, originally delivered in Paris, Washington, Adelaide, Liverpool and Helsinki, and headed them with an introduction that gives the whole book a more theoretical application. The result, written in a style that is at times dazzling in

erudition, wit and, perversely, opacity of argument, is no mere refurbished narrative history served up by a brilliant anthropologist in order to exasperate conventionally minded historians, but a highly stimulating discussion of the relationship between history and structure.

In reply to the question asked by Sartre in his preface to *Search for a Method* (1968), "Do we have today the means to constitute a structural, historical anthropology?" Sahlins says, "Yes. I have tried to suggest here, *le jour est arrivé*", a candid but not necessarily presumptuous claim. His method is to analyse a well-known event, such as the death of Cook, in a way that makes manifest what was hitherto either latent or obscure in commonly received interpretations. In the process his argument might appear to be given too general an application, for Sahlins is not for half measures. In his eyes the murder of Cook, or the repeated toppling of the British flagstaff at Kororareka, Bay of Islands, by the Maori chief Hone Heke in 1844-5, or the coronation ceremonies of nineteenth-century Fijian "stranger-kings" were no mere happenings. They were events (an important distinction), and all events are "culturally systematic". Following Weber, Sahlins maintains that "an event is not just a happening in the world; it is a *relation* between a certain happening and a given symbolic system.... The event is a happening interpreted - and interpretations vary."

They do indeed. But for Sahlins, in order to decode Hone Heke's actions in cutting down the flagpole (no less than four times), "it will be

necessary... to go back to the origin of the universe" - that is, the Maori universe. Similarly, because Hawaiians identified the unheralded arrival of Cook with the annual return of Lono, god of peace and agriculture (followed by a train of events which, in terms of Hawaiian myth and ritual, could not be regarded as mere coincidence), that famous navigator "was a tradition for Hawaiians before he was a fact". Thus it is not simply that to be comprehensible Polynesian histories must always be seen in their contexts; that would be too superficial a view. One must understand that each cultural event is a unique manifestation of a given structure, which is itself modified by that event. Only when perceived in terms of structural-historical anthropology can such conjunctions be comprehended.

Sahlins would not be himself if he wrote solely within the limits of Polynesian historical anthropology. Within each essay, and between them all, he interposes "the bigger issue" of "the dual existence and interaction between the cultural order as constituted in society and as lived by the people: the structure in convention and in action, as virtual and as actual". Or, as he puts the matter with disarming directness, "the problem now is to explode the concept of history by the anthropological experience of culture". So does he succeed? Certainly within the fields of Hawaiian and Maori historiographies Sahlins provides interpretations of Polynesian behaviour that make more sense than anyone else's, even those of the redoubtable J. C. Beaglehole. It is when he

invokes to his aid the Indo-European residues of such giants as Frazer, Chodwick and Dumézil in order to comprehend the divinity kingship among the Fijians that I begin to wonder if the ubiquitous employment of anthropological methods has to be accompanied by a similar use of historical facts.

Such a consideration apart, *Islands of History* must indeed be good news for those specialists, including Polynesian scholars themselves, whose concern is for the well-being of Polynesian historiography. They would surely approve the claim that "the heretofore obscure histories of remote islands deserve a place alongside the self-contemplation of the European past - or the history of 'civilizations' - by their own remarkable contributions to an historical understanding". These days, too, anthropologists of whatever speciality ought to endorse the view that structure is as much a historically defined phenomenon as any culture it articulates. Now that Polynesian, and many other, peoples have realized that they have histories of their own which do not have to be perceived solely through the imposed medium of Western scholarship, it would be disastrous for anthropology to fail to recognize this too. But *Islands of History*, among other things, is also a call for island histories to be taken seriously even by continental historians. But how many historians, I wonder, faced with documentary sources a mere 200 years old, and inheriting a traditionally ingrained ignorance of what anthropologists actually do, will be disposed to take Sahlins seriously?

A supremely good historian

S. F. C. Milsom

G. R. ELTON
F. W. Maitland
118pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £12.95.
0297 786148

The series is called *Historians on Historians*, and the reader might expect a review to be "historian on historian on historian". But this review will be "lawyer on historian on historian" - or perhaps rightly "lawyer on historian on lawyer". To a lawyer, at any rate, the most important thing about G. R. Elton's book is that at last a major historian addresses himself to the Maitland phenomenon.

F. W. Maitland was born in 1850, read mathematics and then philosophy as an undergraduate, practised at the Bar from 1876 until 1884, and passed the rest of his life as a law teacher at Cambridge. It was not a long life. His health began to break down in 1887; from 1898 he had to leave England every winter for the sun; and in 1906 he died. But in little more than twenty handicapped years the lawyer with no historical background made for himself a unique place among English historians.

The core of his work was in English legal history, upon which nothing much had previously been done; and his most important book by far was the *History of English Law before the time of Edward I*, always known, because of a nominal collaboration, as "Pollock and Maitland". It first appeared just ninety years ago; and the second edition of 1898 is still kept in print. And Maitland, who died almost eighty years ago, still lives, is still loved - there is no other word - by those who cannot have seen him, and in his own field is still relied upon by those who have not read him - and few now have read him.

Other historians die: in these days, indeed, they are lucky if they do not die in their own lifetime. Maitland's contemporary Cunningham (1849-1919) was remembered as a figure from another world by Trevelyan (1876-1962): pointless to ask after Cunningham, of course, but where is Trevelyan? Sir Geoffrey Elton has his own list, ending with Neale (1890-1975), "great names once and still remembered for what once they did". But, at any rate in legal history, Maitland is not remembered for what once he did. He is still here and what he did eighty or ninety years ago is still authoritative. How can it be so?

Elton assumes that the answer must lie solely in Maitland's qualities as a historian, and examines his work to find out what those qualities were and what working methods he used. Very interesting results emerge. Two in particular strike home to one who tries to be a legal historian and who also came to the task from the law. One is that Maitland's habit was to begin from a single text and work outwards from it. The point is satisfyingly made in several different contexts; and it is particularly important for the further light it throws on the central part played in the writing of "Pollock and Maitland" by Maitland's immersion in *Anglo-Saxon*. Related with this is the proposition that Maitland's organizing principle was not narrative, of which he generally steered clear, but analysis. He had to puzzle things out on paper - or rather by treating his readers as a lecture audience for whom he was to conjure up a picture of how things worked.

Elton associates this habit of working outwards from a single source with things in the legal background, with the "readings" upon statutes at the Inns of Court and with texts developing their accretions of gloss and commentary. But, at any rate for those who work on legal materials from the Middle Ages, it is not a method for which explanation is needed. There is no other. None of the evidence is immediately intelligible except in the superlatively sense that you generally know - or think you know - what the words mean. You can only try to puzzle out the realities of the dispute behind the plea roll entry, of the disposition that the writer of the charter was trying to make, of the mischief at which the statute was aimed, of the pattern of litigation reflected in the formulae, and so on.

Maitland started from larger texts; and Elton must be right in seeing in this method one explanation of the remarkable speed with which he was able to write as well as of the

conviction which his writings carry. But there is a corollary: the picture that you produce by analysing the questions raised by a single text, however powerful, is a still taken from an unseen movie. And the more powerful it is, the more does it distract your readers from the surrounding change and predispose them (and perhaps yourself) to misunderstand the surrounding evidence. Of course Maitland was conscious of the danger: "We must not judge a long age by one critical moment." But he did not wholly avoid it.

These and other features of Maitland's working methods are discussed at two levels. There are detailed examinations of four specific works, chosen partly as lying close to Elton's own interests: the *Memoranda de Parliamento*; *Roman Canon Law in the Church of England*; *English Law and the Renaissance*, and Maitland's chapter on the Anglican Settlement and the Scottish Reformation in the *Cambridge Modern History*. And there is a wider-ranging discussion in a general chapter on Maitland's historical methods and achievement; and it is here that Maitland's work in the medieval common law is discussed. Elton expressly disclaims special knowledge, but makes a comprehensive and very observant tour of treacherous country with scarcely a wobble.

The overall impression made upon Elton is summed up in the title of his closing chapter: Maitland is the "Patron Saint" of historical studies in England. And this seems to mean rather more than that he can be seen in retrospect as a suitable historian to adopt in that capacity. "The historians of England have been fortunate. When at last they turned serious and professional and committed about their enterprises they had Maitland to show them the way." Elton has certainly assembled an instructive catalogue of respects in which "Maitland stood at the beginning of a journey down the right road". But how far he was in fact taken to have pointed the way is another question. Elton thinks there has been less shoddy work on the Middle Ages than on later periods, and that this is the result of standards set by Maitland. Perhaps. It would be nice to know how far he has in fact been seen as a guide or model, how far he can properly be claimed as one from whom "we historians descend".

So Elton's prime explanation of the phenomenon of Maitland's survival is clear: he was just a supremely good historian. "The strength behind Maitland's astounding endurance lay in the fact that - instinctively, it seems, for he had no guide or model - he chose to work correctly." The legal dimension is regarded as relevant, but not important and certainly not a factor in Maitland's survival. Indeed, as has become customary, he is simply annexed: "The face that the world thought it saw remained that of a lawyer." It was, however, also the face behind which Maitland lived; and he chose to continue so even when offered the chair which Elton now holds. There were reasons beyond the ill-health which he pleaded. History had not yet gained much esteem in Cambridge; and the faculty, corporately and in some cases individually, had not gained Maitland's esteem either. And the Regius chair would take him away from the kind of detailed studies that he wanted to pursue - detailed legal studies. It is perhaps just provocative to observe that some of the more elementary duties of the historian, like "reading the sources properly and solving their problems", were always routine for a lawyer. But there seems little doubt, and Elton is inclined to agree, that the compulsive quality of Maitland's organizing systems owes something to his particular quality as a lawyer.

I am also pretty sure that the extraordinary immediacy of Maitland's writing has to do with his background as a lawyer and law teacher. This is the one quality which English historians have not generally followed. Perhaps it did of frost-bite when the PhD degree, set in, or perhaps it has been, consciously shunned as suspect. A main ingredient is the habit of bringing situations to life in terms of the dialogues of real people. But they are imaginary real people, because neither the legal historian nor the lecturer on modern law can ever find the case which illustrates the truly elementary point, and makes explicit the assumption upon which all the real cases rest. It was too simple to happen, or to be identifiable among records in common form. The point to be communicated



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Annette Weiner

LISETTE JOSEPHIDES
The Production of Inequality: Gender and exchange among the Kewa
242pp. Tavistock. £16.95.
0 422 79720 0

When one Papua New Guinea Highlands clan faces another in a competitive exchange of pigs and pearl-shells to gain prestige, the event is political theatre of the highest order. Behind the exchange is the "big man", who has the clout to convince his kin and allies to assemble their wealth *en masse* and give it all away. These competitive climaxes break through an everyday ethos of egalitarianism to reveal a hierarchy of relations as "big men" strive for prominence and power in their control over the distribution of these goods. Their victorious moment; however, is short-lived. Each major exchange creates new debts and obligations, making political action dependent upon the continual production of pigs and stockpiling of

pearl-shells for future exchanges.

In the 1970s, when feminist thinking directed attention to issues of domination and exploitation between the sexes, the spotlight came to rest on the work of New Guinea women who raise the pigs that create their husbands' fame. Anthropologists working in the Highlands, however, found that the degree to which men dominate over women's productive resources varies from one society to another. For example, Darryl Fell showed how Tombeina Enga women raise their own pigs and enter into formal clan exchanges with men, while among the Mendi, as Rena Lederman illustrated, women have their own personal exchange networks with men but only men participate in the large-scale clan exchanges. In the Melpa case described by Marilyn Strathern, women do not exchange pigs at all, but only produce them.

Lisette Josephides's study of the Kewa-speaking peoples living in the Southern Highlands adds another important example of women's segregation from men's political exchanges. She shows how Kewa men control

and exploit women's production of pigs for their own political ends. While the expression of men's inequality among themselves remains politically muted, their exploitation of women is strongly marked. Josephides claims that "the source" of gender inequalities lies in a "smokescreen" effect whereby the "use" value of pigs is transformed into "exchange" value so that by the time the pigs are exchanged at a pig kill, the relation of a particular pig to its female producer is lost. What counts politically among the Kewa is not the labour of pig production by women but the kinds of obligations and debts among men that the distribution of pork will ensure.

Josephides offers a tantalizing analysis but does not tell us all we need to know. Although Kewa men's voices are often heard discussing with her their experiences and problems, we rarely hear those of individual women. Josephides's data clearly show that women are involved in some kinds of pig exchanges and surely, like the men, they must talk among themselves about their intentions and strategies. But Josephides only tells us that

women redistribute pork "quietly and with little fuss". And whilst she makes interesting inferences to women as sisters, exchanging pig and shells in partnership with their brothers, her overall analysis focuses almost exclusively on women as wives. We learn little about how when, or why married women enter into exchanges as co-partners with their brothers. Women also exchange shells on their own, although "with little display", but we never learn how they obtain their rights to the shell or how the essential use of shells as compensation payments when someone dies intersects with the politics of raising and exchanging pigs.

Knowledge of such important details might not alter Josephides's representation of Kewa women's inequality *vis-à-vis* men, but it would help us to understand the specific exchange relations that underlie their domination. The Kewa may be beguiled by a "smokescreen" through which objects obtain exchange value but, by not telling us more about how Kewa women use pigs and pearl-shells against men, each other, Josephides has unfortunately created a "smokescreen" of her own.

brings to the task, and can also give detailed analyses of the texts showing how subtleties of meaning are imparted by means of the manipulation of syntactical features.

Although there are advantages in this method, it makes for a very lengthy (and very expensive) book: over 200 of the 311 pages of main text are taken up with the simple recounting of myths. This might have been justified had Basso been able to show that so extended a form of presentation was essential to understanding their meaning. But most of her points concern the question of how meanings are imparted rather than what those meanings actually are, and could have been equally well made with no more than a couple of examples.

Important though the demonstration of the skills involved in Kalapalo narrative performance may be, the point of greatest general theoretical significance raised in the book concerns the relationship between ritual and myth. Like many others before her, Basso takes issue with Lévi-Strauss's dictum that the analysis of ritual cannot help in the elucidation of the meaning of myth, or vice versa, since they are essentially different things, myth being an assemblage of language while ritual is essentially intra-linguistic. Basso contests this argument along two principal lines. First, she demonstrates that there are "thematic homologies" between the two by showing how details

of mythological narrative can illuminate the details of ritual; and, second, she argues that both ritual and myth share with music the capacity to carry the individual beyond the confines of the self and unite him with another, culturally sanctioned transcendent reality. The title of the book is an allusion to this.

It is debatable whether either of these arguments fully engages the position adopted by Lévi-Strauss, let alone undermines it. But the two, it is Basso's discussion of "thematic homologies" between ritual and myth that is the more provocative, even if it is not always satisfactory. A simple example: the mortuary ritual involving a dance in which the participants imitate the movements of a snake in elucidated by reference to a myth in which a man leaves his family "once and for all" to live with a Snake Wife. Because it involves a permanent separation of the man from his family, the myth is said to evoke the finality of death. Hence it is appropriate that the dance should be a snake dance at a funeral. But this is a weak connection on the basis of comparative evidence. One wonders whether the snake dance is not associated with immortality, as this is a pan-Amazonian association based on the snake's ability to change its skin. Examples of this kind leave one feeling at the end of the book that there is still a good deal to be said about Kalapalo symbolism.

Amazonian performances

Paul Henley

ELLEN B. BASSO
A Mystical View of the Universe
344pp. University of Pennsylvania Press;
distributed by Academic and University
Publishers Group. £35.
08122 7931 X

The Kalapalo are one of a dozen or so small Amerindian groups who live in the Xingu National Park, a reservation on the upper reaches of one of the largest right-bank tributaries of the Amazon. Thanks to the protection afforded by the Park, these groups have been able to maintain many of the customs of their aboriginal way of life. To the outside world, the Xinguanos are perhaps best known for their elaborate public rituals, which not only clearly demonstrate a remarkable aesthetic sensitivity but are also the product of a great deal of collective effort. It was therefore surprising to read in a monograph by Ellen Basso that "the majority of ceremonies performed by the Kalapalo have little ideological significance" and that they involved "little, if any, manipulation of ritual symbols". She has changed her mind radically; for in *A Mystical View of the Universe* she describes Kalapalo ritual, together with their traditions of mytho-

logical narrative, as "symbolic action aimed toward the comprehension of the world and of the self through active imagining and performative experience".

Basso is not unique in making such a volte-face. The symbolic processes of the native peoples of Amazonia are characteristically opaque and it often requires a profound knowledge of a particular society even to identify these symbols for what they are, let alone understand their meaning. In Basso's case, it seems to have been the result, most simply, of spending more time with them. But, judging from her introduction, it seems she was also influenced by two particular bodies of literature: on the one hand, the work of sociologists on various forms of North American narrative performance; and, on the other, Lévi-Strauss's celebrated comparative study, *Mythologiques*, which deals with both North and South American indigenous material.

Following the example of the sociologists, Basso attempts to reproduce Kalapalo myth in a way that conveys the feeling of the original narrative performance. That is, they are given more or less verbatim, as performed, complete with their characteristic features of redundancy, onomatopoeia, reported speech and other devices intended to augment the rhetorical effect. She is thus able to demonstrate the verbal skills of an accomplished performer

is central, beyond doubt, reflected in all the real cases: but there is no way to communicate it clearly except to turn dramatist.

But this is to suggest additions to Elton's survey of Maitland's qualities. And one can accept all that Elton says and more, and yet wonder whether those qualities alone can explain Maitland's survival for so long a time. Neither history nor any other form of scholarship is like that. Would he even be remembered now if he had written just the four works which Elton particularly scrutinizes? What really remains authoritative is "Pollock and Maitland" and the other work in legal history. Nor is even this much read, except by a handful of strictly legal historians: but its basic propositions have become received doctrine. In Elton's words, "The man who declared that an orthodox history was a contradiction in terms created despite himself an orthodoxy." And some of it is anchored "in concrete so well set that every effort of doubt or modification calls for dynamite". Indeed: *teste me ipso*.

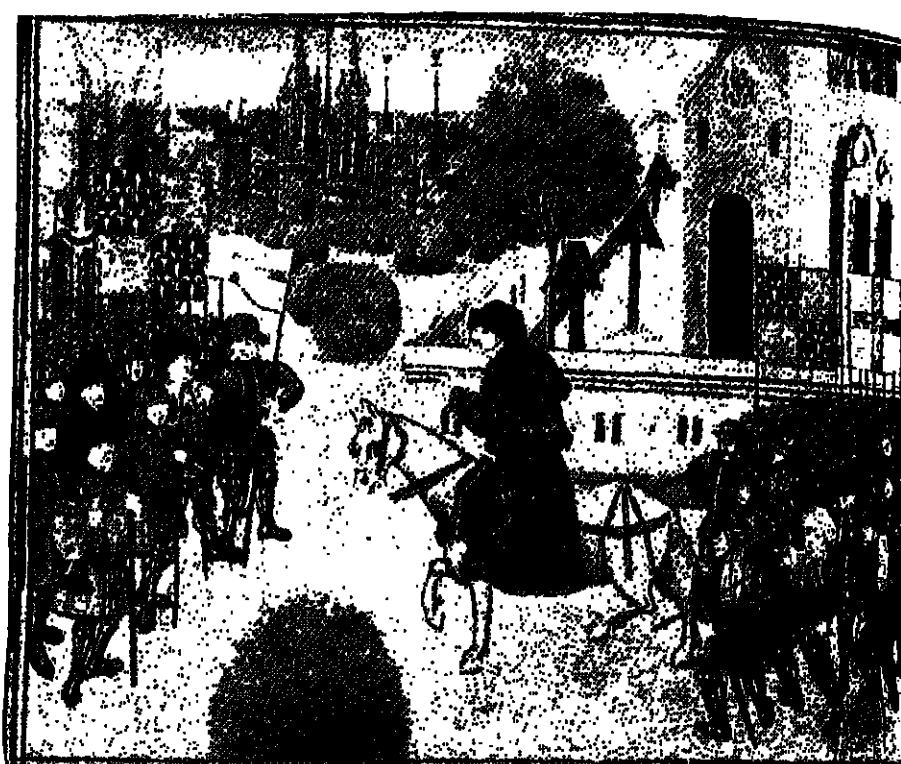
"It is we who are guilty of our own law": of our own history also. Maitland gave his verdict on the law of real property in 1879 because what had seemed right so long before was still unchanged; and the largest single reason for the survival of his work is that for the better part of a century historians have preferred to rely on his authority rather than to re-examine the evidence. It saves tedious spadework of course, but there is more to it than that. Who should do the work? Maitland thought it would have to be lawyers, and was told off by Plucknett, who felt himself entitled to dismiss the proposition as a symptom of illness. Elton is more charitable, but associates this with another proposition of Maitland's about working backwards from the known to the unknown; and he rightly judges that a century of change has made the modern law no place to start from for destinations in the sixteenth century or earlier. Maitland certainly moved backwards from Domesday and from *Bracton*; but I do not think he often consciously began from the law of his own day. And Elton passes over his other reason: people are unlikely to put

their minds to medieval procedure and the like unless they have learnt in a modern context how important in a subterranean way such things can be.

Maitland put the matter in terms of the patience required. In less leisureed days one must think in terms of time and career prospects; and at least a substantial proportion of a lifetime is needed to come seriously to grips with the medieval legal materials. Historians – not many – have studied details, mostly institutional and inevitably within Maitland's framework. History faculties are unlikely to reward deeper involvement. The only historian to have attempted more, not just with institutions but with the law itself, was Plucknett. But Plucknett was supported throughout his working life by law faculties – and even in his work the lack of legal background shows through. Others in the field have been lawyers, whose employers and colleagues have been tolerant or at least resigned. But they have not enjoyed Plucknett's lifelong freedom from the bread-and-butter duties of a law teacher, from which perhaps, and perhaps like Maitland, they have derived relevant insight.

So the subject falls, as it were, between two chairs. But there is still more to the loss, and to the power of that orthodoxy which Maitland created. The loss is clearly perceived by Elton, as the need was by Maitland: behind the mass of legal records surviving from the Middle Ages is the reality of people's lives; and much of it will be recoverable when the legal technicalities are decoded. But not before: there is no short cut. Meanwhile, however, historians cannot write without making assumptions about those lives and about the framework in which they were led. And if the lives sometimes seem rather empty, driven by little except crude financial gain, that may be the result of seeing what people did, but not quite how they were placed or how they saw things.

So where do those assumptions about life and society come from, that the legal evidence may one day modify? At least part of the power of the Maitland orthodoxy is its universal character. It is not just that "Pollock and Maitland"



"John Bull and Wai Tyler leading the Peasants' Revolt of 1381"; taken from Elizabeth M. Hallam's *Domesday Book: Through Nine Centuries* (224pp. Thames and Hudson. £12.50. 0500 25097 9), to be published on March 10.

projected *Bracton* backwards. The Roman language and approach of *Bracton* suggested a state of development not reached until much later times. What Maitland seemed to provide was a legal vision basically valid for all periods; and historians have gone about their business reassured that they need not bother much because the law did not matter much. Maitland

wanted to unravel the law for its own sake; but I think he would have seen this as the real damage done by the long reliance on his work. "The thought that he might have brought the history of the law to a standstill by the authority of his writings would have horrified him. Perhaps from Professor Elton the message will be heard.

The birth of a profession

Jonathan Sumption

RALPH V. TURNER
The English Judiciary in the Age of Glanvill and Bracton, c1176-1239
321pp. Cambridge University Press. £25.
0521 26510 X

This book is an attempt to write the personal history of English judges during one of the most interesting and productive periods of our legal history. It is written, Ralph Turner says, according to the method of "prosopography, a new approach to medieval biography", but readers should not be deterred by this. The method is in fact rather old, and Mr Turner does not always follow it.

In the infancy of English legal history the judges exercised a formative influence on the development of the law, the like of which they have never achieved since, even in an age of relatively forceful judicial interventionism. They did this not by their judgments, which rarely gave reasons and set no binding precedents, but by their writings and by their influence on royal legislation. "Do not construe the statute," a bench of Edward I's judges once said to a barrister; "we know it better than you do for we made it."

There was general agreement, among intelligent observers, at least in the latter part of Turner's period, that the king's judges were, by and large, able, learned and wise. Nevertheless, they were despised and disliked by a surprisingly large number of people. The twelfth-century scholar John of Salisbury believed that they were venal, nepotistic and ignorant of law. His contemporary, the spiteful Walter Map, wrote that they were of low birth, a serious matter since "Nothing is harder than the lowly whenever he rises to high degree".

All of these criticisms (except ignorance) were repeated in the thirteenth century by Matthew Paris and by many others whose prose style was less spicy.

These commentators, and others who wrote like them, had axes to grind – and this has caused some historians, including F. W. Maitland, to discount what they have to say. But their views were too commonly expressed to be wholly wrong, and some are borne out by more objective evidence. In the 1290s, after the period covered by Turner's work, Edward I

conducted a spring-clean of judges in the course of which many were fined or dismissed for more or less serious malpractice. Something very similar happened in the 1340s, in the reign of his grandson. For all their ability, learning and wisdom, English medieval judges were corrupt.

The most important single reason for their corruption was that salaries were not offered as a matter of course until well into the thirteenth century and then were low and paid late. The judges therefore took fees, perquisites and tips. At best these payments made justice expensive in medieval England; at worst they made it unobtainable by anyone unwilling to pay a bribe. Even the most venomous critics of the judges generally admitted that they might properly take some money from litigants provided that they did not cross the industrial line between selling their skills and for selling their verdict. But too many of them for conduct made fortunes. A man like Stephen Segreve, Henry III's chief justice of common pleas, must have crossed the line often. He began life as an ordinary knight and accumulated landed wealth on a scale which raised his descendants to the peerage.

Segreve's relatively lowly origins were very characteristic of his kind. Royal judges were generally men of respectable but undistinguished birth who made their career in royal service much as any courtier or bureaucrat. In the early years, during the reign of Henry II, they generally came to their jobs with little knowledge of law and did the work part-time between periods of political or administrative service of a more general kind. The transformation of the royal judges into full-time professionals, unconcerned with other aspects of royal government, scholarly, infected by a pride and *esprit de corps* which have lasted, was surprisingly rapid. Turner traces its whole course through the seventy-year period spanned by his book.

The history of England's lawyers and legal institutions suffers from having been written mainly by lawyers with a rather insular view of their subject and limited interest in larger questions of social history. The great Maitland is an exception but we could do with others. England's medieval judges are men obscure to posterity, but they cut great figures in their day and contributed as much to the formation of English society as any group of public servants. Ralph Turner has done well for them.

The field-workers' tale

Gillian Beer

MARTIN J. S. RUDWICK
The Great Devonian Controversy: The shaping of scientific knowledge among gentlemanly specialists
404pp. University of Chicago Press. £36.75.
0226 73101 4

Readers of this narrative might with advantage have been issued with a geological hammer, a pair of stout shoes, and a train ticket to Devon. The Devonian controversy in the 1830s concerned the dating of rock strata; it was set in motion by the empirical geologist de la Beche who claimed that certain fossil plants he had discovered came from Greywacke rock formations of the Transition age. At the start the term "Devonian" referred to a place; by the end it denoted a specific period in the history of the earth.

Martin Rudwick's narrative method seeks to escape from the summary knowingness of retrospective history in favour of our participation in "actor-orientated" discovery. Central to the controversy was the argument between field-workers and theorists. Professor Rudwick casts us as the field-workers of his narrative, held back from any premature formation of theoretical positions concerning the outcome of the debate he describes by the slow chronological working-through of its phases in the long central section of the book. Rudwick is very aware of the romanticism with which field-work was viewed by geologists, amateur and professional, in the period he is studying, as his introductory analysis makes clear: "Fieldwork was a kind of 'liminoid' pilgrimage away from effete urban luxury into a closer communion with rural nature; it was also initiation and ordeal."

The invocation of knight-errantry was common in Victorian scientific writing: Philip Gosse saw the natural historian as a roving knight in the service of his lady, Nature, who in her turn is the servant of God. But as narrative field-workers in this book we are made to experience also the drudgery of practice without theory: our spirits are taxed by Rudwick's resistance to offering us the theorizing pleasures of prospect and retrospect as we work through the story. I take it that the reader's enforced role-playing is a deliberate tactic on Rudwick's part. It is his means of righting the balance between field-work and theory within narrative: narrating is an essentially theorizing activity and the reader is set imaginatively closer to the position of the theorist than of the practical worker. Reading is a "bookish" activity, after all (and so is writing). As a corrective, Rudwick makes us undertake readerly fieldwork: long hours of reading sequences of events which may seem to yield no results, as well as rare dramatic finds.

The book is a remarkable experiment in narrative history, underpinned by meticulous scholarship and a profound acquaintance both with its documents and with current issues in scientific historiography. It raises contentious methodological questions. It takes as a model

for its massive enquiry into a particular controversy the "thick description" which, in "Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture", Clifford Geertz contrasts with E. B. Tylor's "most complex whole". Geertz's "semiotic" concept of culture recognizes the uneasy fit between behaviour and writing: "through the flow of behaviour – or, more precisely, social action – cultural forms find articulation... to write down changes passing event into account". Rudwick has chosen an episode in which, for the participants, writing down was a primary form of social action. He points out that conversation was a less effective medium of exchange than letter-writing because of the particular geographical and postal conditions which prevailed. (When the recipient was paying a hefty price to receive a letter it behoved the sender to offer good written value; the arrival of the penny post reduced the documentary usefulness of correspondence to future scholars.)

Rudwick, like other recent historians of science, emphasizes that it is "the activities of persons, not disembodied ideas, concepts, theories, or 'research programs', that constitute research traditions". But his definition of the "social" is more constrained than Geertz's. Rudwick writes: "the processes of scientific knowledge making" are "inherently and intrinsically social in character, not (or not primarily) in the sense of the pressures of the wider social world, but in the sense of intense social interaction among a small group of participants". But persons live within multiple systems; the pressures of the wider social world cannot be set on one side: they are internalized, with differing degrees of resistance, by all participants in a historical period. Moreover, time never flows at one pace within history (otherwise we are back with decade study). Furthermore, the activities of a social group cannot be sufficiently described within the terms available to that group. These are some particular methodological objections to Rudwick's interpretation of "thick description". A more general difficulty with it is that it may yield more and more information of the same kind. Rudwick tackles that difficulty, and to a large extent controls it, by offering other styles of analysis in the excellent opening and closing sections of the book. Another general problem of "thick description" is that since there are no formal limits of relevance to such enquiry any exclusion may appear ideological. With all its promise of inclusiveness the book does not describe everything; its lateral enquiry is highly selective; its apparent inclusiveness may actually damp down further interrogation of the evidence. No questions are debarred, but not all of them are raised, or answered: how did these men vote? what size garden did each have? and what did their wives feel about them and their work – for example, the "highly intelligent" Charlotte Murchison alluded to once on page 67? Rudwick dwells on the difficulty of distinguishing the contingent from the evidential, but in the last sentence of his analytical caption to de la Beche's sketch of himself kept indoors by rain he jokes: "The mice have no geological significance." By this stage of the

argument the reader might retort: "Can we be sure?" Narrative, even of the leisurely Thackerayan kind that Rudwick alludes to in his chapter headings, can never offer completed explanation. There is always more to be taken into account.

The book's title is in some measure ironic: "The Great Devonian Controversy", like other engrossing intellectual battles, has vanished into obscurity, its issues recalled by geologists only in terms of their outcome, while for much of the rest of the world the fact that the controversy happened at all will be news. What, then, are the intellectual advantages of choosing a relatively minor episode (as in the long condescension of posterity this now seems to be) for description and analysis? One point it allows Rudwick to demonstrate is that scientific knowledge is the outcome of social interactions, but is not simply at the mercy of such interactions. A new colour on a map may be the intellectual product of intense personal animosity and debate; its correctness or incorrectness will be sustained by further enquiry and, once established, shakes free of the incalculable personages. The production of knowledge, he also shows, may be constrained by unstated, and often unnoticed, agreements within the group concerned; this can best be demonstrated where the names involved are not so starchy that we can securely foresee the outcome. One of the particular gains of the book is that by placing Lyell and Sedgwick alongside Murchison and de la Beche it becomes clear that in the ferment of controversy the appearance of well-known names need not augur the correctness of the views associated with that party.

Another important demonstration is that scientific controversies (like most intellectual controversies) are not simply confrontations between truth and error. The outcome may be the expansion of a term, or a change in nomenclature, rather than the routing of a party. Rudwick is astute in his analysis of the military and political discourses through which participants in the controversy claimed authority for their views, and he shows that consensus was reached when the acceptance of the term "Devonian" in international classificatory language had erased virtually all "its originally English connotations". Professor Rudwick's large scholarly narrative brings home the realization that reaching new meaning always involves loss of meaning. His work also brings home the forgotten impress of persons within that process of loss and gain: his scrupulously documented case-history conveys a sense of sadness and limitation quite as strong as the intellectual pleasure of debate among his "gentlemanly specialists". The major methodological issues that his own work raises cannot fail to stimulate fruitful debate – perhaps as eager and productive a debate as that concerning the theoretical implications of Greywacke flora within the Geological Society of London in the 1830s.

A Victorian World of Science by Alan Sutton (227pp. Bristol: Adam Hilger. £12.50. 0 85274 559 1) is a collection of items from a popular nineteenth-century weekly magazine, *The English Mechanic*, aimed at the working-class reader, which began publication in 1865. The articles, mostly taken from issues in the 1890s, cover an encyclopaedic range of topics arranged under five headings: practical science; household science; science as recreation; medical science; velocipedes and flying machines.

The haphazard nature of the compilation, which can move from items on headaches, to baldness, to infections and their causes, to malaria, to "the therapeutic Value of Venomous Substances" and so on, may be a faithful reflection of the magazine's original style, but it does little to enhance the material. Alan Sutton often restricts his role as editor to gasps of admiration at how modern our Victorian ancestors were in their preoccupations. Presumably if he knew that in the seventeenth century rumours of a workable submarine with an independent air supply were in circulation, "speaking tubes" and flying machines were much discussed and that food fads and fashionable "aerobics" were all the rage, he would find that period equally modern.

Patricia Phillips

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PETER G. BIETENHOLZ and THOMAS B. DEUTSCHER (Editors)
Contemporaries of Erasmus: A biographical register of the Renaissance and Reformation, Volume One, A-E
462pp. University of Toronto Press. £50.
08020 2507 2

Few scholars have attracted as wide a circle of correspondents as Desiderius Erasmus – men of every rank, whether offering patronage, wishing to discuss their own plans and ideals, or sometimes desiring no more than to express their admiration for the man embodying the learning to which they aspired. And, in the course of their correspondence, Erasmus and his friends touched on every subject of possible

interest to them in the domains of religion, politics and scholarship. *Contemporaries of Erasmus: A biographical register of the Renaissance and Reformation* thus relates to the whole world of learning between 1480 and 1540, covering all Europe from the Bosphorus to the Atlantic. Its compilation requires a pool of knowledge of exceptional depth. The editorial board of the Toronto Edition of the *Collected Works of Erasmus* have assembled an impressive team of experts. Besides the editors themselves, Peter G. Bietenholz and Thomas B. Deutscher, more than 120 scholars have contributed, including Ise Guenther, Catherine Gunderson, Marie-Madeleine de la Garanderie, Jozsef Jsewijn, Anthony Grafton, C. B. Schmitt and J. B. Trapp. Many of the Dutch entries have been provided by C. G. van Leijenhofst; the Poles are dealt with mainly by Halina Kowalska; and the Turks by Fehmi Ismail.

The result is a most satisfactory reference book. Intended primarily as a supplement to the *Collected Works* and the admirable critical apparatus with which each of those volumes is furnished, the *Biographical register* is also meant to improve on the notes in P. S. Allen's standard edition of Erasmus's *Letters*. Over 1,900 entries in the entire register, two further volumes of which are due to appear, will refer to all the names mentioned in Erasmus's correspondence, and emphasis is rightly given to the dealings of each individual with him. The lengths of the entries vary greatly, and the longer and more rewarding ones tend to be on lesser-known figures like Louis de Berquin and Maarten van Dorp, whose chief claim to renown derives from their acquaintance with the Dutch humanist.

Contemporaries of Erasmus is not only an excellent companion for any edition of his writings and of the utmost use to students of the period, but – and one can pay it no higher compliment – because of the high standard of the entries and the learning invested in them, Erasmus himself would have thoroughly enjoyed it.

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Intuitions of blessedness

John Drury

CHANA BLOCH
Spelling the Word: George Herbert and the Bible
324pp. University of California Press. £27.50.
0520051211
GENE EDWARD VEITH, JR
Reformation Spirituality: The religion of George Herbert
289pp. Associated University Presses. £24.50.
03877 5071 0

Only a critic who has felt with George Herbert and inwardly digested him could write of him and his Bible, as Chana Bloch does in *Spelling the Word*, that he

brings to his study of the text that minute absorption with which we examine ourselves in the mirror, that absorption with which we read whatever is written about us: it is his mirror, his story.

Herbertian in manner as in matter, the insight gives the right sort of life, tense and intimate, to the vast evidence of Herbert's way with scripture. Bloch investigates it richly and without a trace of tedium. Surprisingly, she detects the influence of the dinner-table parables in Luke's Gospel while missing the pervasive influence of its greatest parable, the Prodigal Son. It is implicit in "Love III" and surfaces with "But I will to my Father" in "Assurance": in the poem as in the parable, the words are the inward turning-point of the movement. But that is a very small complaint, and really testi-

Exuberance denied

Alan Rudrum

ROBERT WILCHER
Andrew Marvell
191pp. Cambridge University Press. £19.50
(paperback, £6.95).
0521 258197

Given Robert Wilcher's aim - at "inexperienced readers" - his concentration on Marvell's lyrics and "Upon Appleton House" is entirely justified. The "background" in politics, science and philosophy is deftly sketched in; Marvell's central concerns accurately registered; and his idiosyncrasies freshly described, as where Wilcher writes of his "habit of sliding one meaning over another, like two transparencies, so that we can choose to attend to one or the other, or both together". But are Marvell's ambiguities always deliberate or are they occasionally the product of old-fashioned imprecision? "What field of all the Civil Wars / Where his were not the deepest scars?" is accorded the bare comment, "On the field of battle, he gave the deepest scars". Correct as this may be, it will surely leave "inexperienced readers" puzzled. Nor does citation of classical precedent, as in the revised Margoliouth edition, quite suffice, as a marginal *cri de coeur* in the Radcliffe Camera copy ("what's the relevance of this?") suggests. We need to know the reason for rejecting the obvious reading (Cromwell was not in fact severely wounded) before being pointed to classical "justification" for Marvell's usage, which then leaves room for discussion as to whether it really is justified.

Dr Wilcher comments more fully elsewhere, remarking that "the inadequacy of the falcon image . . . enhances, by contrast, the magnanimity of Cromwell, whose submission to Parliament and people is an act of moral choice, whereas the obedience of bird to falconer is merely a conditioned response to training". Is it not rather that the falcon acts according to its nature, and that such action is equivalent to the operation of conscience in man? On this more historical reading, the simile is not "inadequate", intentionally or otherwise, but exact and just.

In the case of Marvell's best-known poem, "To his Coy Mistress", one feels the need for discussion of the handling of so profane a theme in so Christian a time. Is the poem to be taken merely as verbal and logical fun and games? Are readers expected to evaluate it by reference to a superlatively guaranteed ethic of which the naturalism of "the words on the page" knows nothing? Doubts arise too about the over-straight treatment of "The Definition

fies to Bloch's skill in getting one to look in the right places.

Herbert was lucky. He had, like Augustine, confidence in the value of his own experience as worth the overhearing of "mine own kind, the human kind"; because as readers of it we "may bethink ourselves out of what depths we cry unto Thee". So Augustine and Herbert carry powerfully into our world. Herbert had another confidence which has been lacking to us. It was in a Bible still, if only just, not dismembered and disenchanted by criticism. Here was a very objective correlative: "me understood" by continual reference to the welter of biblical experience, which was unified on the far side by God and on the near side by the individual self. So Herbert read the line of his life as a biblical commentary.

The multiple references involved look like clutter of the sort which Aubrey says he inflicted on his church at Bemerton:

In the Chancel are many apt sentences of the Scripture. At his Wife's Seat, *My life is hid with Christ in God* (he hath many verses on this Text in his Poems). Above, in a little window-blinded, with a Velle (ill painted) *Thou art my hiding place*.

Emblems, texts, puns and contraptions: like the miscellaneous objects with which Flaubert's *Félicité* filled her attic bedroom, these are not junk but a sort of relics, sacraments of "so many deaths" and of tense, living moments. Often they recall, in Bloch's words, "momentary intuitions of blessedness in a chronicle that is filled with despondency and bitterness of spirit". Chana Bloch notices a

of Love", when the vision of love in "To his Coy Mistress" is described as "more profoundly and movingly human than the self-absorbed philosophizing of a mind more interested in defining love than in consummating it". This surely betrays a failure to respond adequately to the element of play in Marvell's writing. Professional readers will recognize this book, in its care, its good manners, the measured justice of its discussions, as the product of an authentic scholarly enthusiasm. Newcomers to Marvell, whose own experience makes them want to read it, may feel it lacks some quality answering to that joyous exuberance which Marvell communicates and which he surely experienced in the act of composition, whether arguing or defining or creating luminous images. In how many poets do such power and discipline of intellect coexist with such passionate sensuous delight?

source of their power in Herbert's attraction to "the nodal point of history as it is recorded in scripture, the junction between Old and New, precisely because he encounters it time and again in his own experience". Here is that betwixt-and-betweenness noticed by anthropologists like Edmund Leach as a vibrant source of religious energy, liminal and Janus-faced.

Herbert, like St Paul, lived there. Extension between extremes was his human nature. Man was "a crumme of dust" stretched "from heav'n to hell", racked "to such a vast extent" and tortured by his own instability. Again Herbert carries into our world. Herbertian man is like Dmitry Karamazov's: inhabited by contradictions and "wide, too wide. I would narrow him!" They both need Christianity as a framework, broad enough and particular enough to make sense of their errant lives. That is why the submission in Herbert's poetry is wholesome. It is not the result of weakness

Poetic bugs and butterflies

Katherine Duncan-Jones

EDWARD DOUGHTIE (Editor)
Liber Lilliat: Elizabethan verse and song
232pp. Associated University Presses. £26.50.
087432673

For modern readers, the dichotomy between "published" and "manuscript" poetry is absolute. Hopkins's poems, for instance, would not be described as having been "published" before 1918, despite the fact that they had been read by Bridges, Yeats and others, and had exercised a powerful if secondary influence on other poets. It was not so for the Elizabethans. The nine surviving manuscripts of the "Old *Arcadia*" testify to its having been effectively "published" during the 1580s - so much so that Greville thought it not much in need of printing. Many courtly lyrics were copied and recopied so frequently that they were probably quite as well known as those which found their way into the printed miscellanies. Some of the poems in John Lilliat's notebook (Bodleian Ms Rawl Poet 148), now painstakingly edited by Edward Doughtie, are of this kind: for instance, Essex's, or Henry Cuffe's, fable of the speaking bees, here attributed to Lyly. Disappointingly, Lilliat appears to have drawn on printed sources for most of the better poems he includes, such as three by Sidney - the textual variants here look like mistakes in copying rather than alternative versions. A possible

exception is the alternative reading "all this" for "each thing" in the final line of OA 21, but the Sidney sample is too small to make a definite conclusion possible. Remote Sidney connections are suggested by two sonnets on Lady Rich's non-scarring smallpox (nos 76 and 77), not found elsewhere, and a text of "Amidst the fayrest mountayne toppes" where three alternative ascriptions, the last to Dyer, include one to "L: Mountjoy, Lady Rich's lover. Lilliat's connection with Sidney probably was indeed remote, for he was a Chichester chorister in 1565, and may have been still there when Sidney arrived in February 1568. However, he did not compile the present notebook until the late 1590s, by which time he was a vicar choral of Chichester Cathedral and perhaps too far from London to have access to major courtly manuscripts.

Lilliat's own verses, some religious, some occasional, fill up much of the notebook. As Professor Doughtie points out, they are touched by the poetic innovations of the Elizabethan Golden Age; and are all too often "clumsy, verbose and lacerous". The mixture is not much leavened by the work of "the relatively unfamiliar clergyman poets Richard Eedes, Richard Latewar and John Langworth". Many of the 163 items in the notebook are aphoristic, epigrammatic or scurrilous; devoted to them by the editor. A particularly notable example is no 52, which begins "The tuff Turds did I tosse in th' teeth . . .". Many of the shorter lyrics promise little and perform still less. One example may suffice, Lilliat's own "verses sent, with a Butterflie which was framed in Networke":

It is not *Virgils* silly Gnat,
which to your self I heere commend;
Nor Frogs, nor file, nor this, nor that,
Of whom great *Plutarch* poemmes read.
Nor may I terme it reede or ruse,
Advantaged so by *Homers* quill;
But even a Butterflie at blase,
To manifest my old good will.

This falls a good way short of Herrick on a very bad day, and though it may have been pleasant to be the Elizabethan lady who received these lines planned on to a gift of lace or filigree. It is fairly boring to be the lady or gentleman who reads them now. In principle, scholarly and handsomely produced single-manuscript editions like the present one are to be warmly welcomed, but in practice it may be found that many are really more suited to microfilm publication, with brief accompanying notes on provenance, date and authorship. As the publicity recently given to some poems attributed to Shakespeare may show, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century manuscript miscellanies abound in poetic butterflies or lesser bugs, too slight to survive being scientifically monitored and analysed. Professor Doughtie's work is much more intelligent than John Lilliat's, and it would be nice to see his skills exercised on better material.

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D.E. RHODES (Editor)
Catalogue of Books Printed in the XVth Century now in the British Library
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116pp. British Library. £60.
07123 00228

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Hebrew Incunables in the British Isles: A preliminary census
42pp. British Library. £9.50.
07123 00473

BARRY C. JOHNSON
Lost in the Alps: A portrait of Robert Proctor, the "great bibliographer" and of his career in the British Museum
49pp. Obtainable from the author, 39a Kildare Terrace, London W2. £2.75.

The last volume of *BMC* - as the catalogue of books printed in the fifteenth century held in the British Museum, and now in the British Library, is known (it will take a while for *BLC* to become established) - appeared in 1971; it covered the Iberian Peninsula. *England, Hebrides* and no doubt further supplements have yet to appear, in a project first mooted in 1893. The series, majestic in its conception and unhampered in its construction, is one of the pillars of the incunabular establishment; and as the first of its kind (part supplement, part corrigenda) the *Catalogue of Books Printed in the XVth Century now in the British Library, Part XII: Italy (supplement)* is an especially welcome sign of continuing activity. The four original volumes for Italy appeared in 1916-35. Since then, not only has the British Library added to its resources, but investigations of the presses and their products (many of them by Dennis E. Rhodes, the editor of this volume) have also called for reconsideration, redating and reattribution.

The new volume records 216 items (excluding duplicates) from twenty-one different towns, from the major centres such as Venice to the many small north Italian towns in which presses were set up and taken down with a speed that nearly always challenges explanation. In 1977, for example, the Library was given the unique copy of a Psalter, the one book known to have been printed in the fifteenth century at Castano Primo, a little to the west of Milan. Priorities for acquisitions have remained the same for a long time: books from presses not already in the existing collections, and examples of typefaces otherwise unrepresented, quite apart from the ordinary literary criteria. As a consequence of this policy and its associated catalogues, the Library's collections have an authority matched by no other institution. In this volume, as usual, several pages are devoted to full-size photographs of typefaces, which do much to mitigate the inadequacies of a system for describing them devised several generations ago.

By no means all the books described have entered the Library for the first time in the last half-century or so. Purchases have been noticeably more frequent over the past twenty-five years, but there have been discoveries among the older collections as well. The volume opens with two Rome books from the Grenville Library, both clearly dated, but there are books from the Cracherode, George III and Sussex collections as well, besides redated examples transferred from the General Library.

More recent, and fresh, acquisitions reflect the breaking up of collections this century: the gift of Sir Charles Sherrington in the 1930s, the Landau and Fürstberg libraries, the

The Huguenot Society Quarto Series 57, Irene Scouloud's *Returns of Strangers in the Maropoliis*, 1593, 1627, 1635, 1639 (368pp. Huguenot Society, 67 Victoria Road, London W8 5RH). £15. ISBN 0309 8354) completes the publication of this group of Returns known to date. Max Scouloud has rearranged them in alphabetical order of subject, with the 1593 Return printed separately; in an extensive preliminary survey she discusses the ordinary daily

Constructing the Past: Essays in historical methodology, edited by Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora (217pp. Cambridge University Press. £25.00 £21.25pb 2), provides a selection

arrival of the Hirsch library, the dispersal of the relevant portions of the Broxbourne library in the 1970s. None, however, has provided so rich a source as the great Holkham sale of 1951, or the Chatsworth sale of 1958, which between them accounted for close on a hundred fresh incunabula alone from all parts of Europe. These collections are all mentioned, but the British Library persists, here at any rate, in cloaking most purchases in anonymity, quoting neither auction nor booksellers' catalogues: it would save time in tracing copies of these rare books if the catalogue could be more frank on this score, and would add a useful perspective to the Library's collections.

It would be a help, too, if the constituent parts of pamphlet volumes were more regularly identified by cross-reference: perhaps more can be done in future volumes. Meanwhile there is here already one great improvement, in the assignation of dates, however tentative, to every item. No one who consults fifteenth-century books (and not only those that are printed) can afford to neglect the annotations, be they on authorship, editorship, textual questions, or the articulation of classical texts, quite apart from the more obvious questions surrounding places of production and publication.

The volume ignores Hebrew incunables, despite the great centres for their printing at Soncino and Naples. For these, in *Hebrew Incunables in the British Isles*, David Goldstein has produced an admirably concise preliminary census of some 106 different editions, of which over three-quarters were printed in Italy, and one in 1493 at Constantinople: the centres of production are made clear by Dr Goldstein's decision to set out the list in Proctor order, town by town and printer by printer, as in *BMC*. His trawl has covered twenty-four named collections in the British Isles, together with the Jewish National and University Libraries in Jerusalem, besides anonymous private collections. While undoubtedly more will be discovered, and there is a great deal to be found out as to provenances, this is very much more, with its attendant bibliographical references, than the word *preliminary* in the subtitle might at first suggest.

Both *BMC* and Goldstein look back to a single genius, Robert Proctor, who went up to Oxford in 1886, the same year that the founding father of modern incunabular studies, Henry Bradshaw, died. Proctor's training was in the library at Corpus Christi as an undergraduate, and then at the Bodleian, until in 1893 he joined the British Museum. At the Museum he was in his element, his work apparently interrupted almost more by fog than by readers; and if the vagaries of some of the other staff sometimes irritated, he also found his principal friends there, among them A. W. Pollard, the binding historian Cyril Davenport, and Samuel Butler's literary executor, R. A. Streetfield. But less than ten years later Proctor was dead in the Alps, having produced even in his first four years at the Museum the *Index* to early printed books there and at the Bodleian, arranged on principles developed by Bradshaw at Cambridge and Edward Gordon Duff at Oxford that *BMC* follows to this day. In *Lost in the Alps* Barry C. Johnson has drawn on Proctor's diary and correspondence, as well as other reminiscences, to present a vivid account that catches much of the frantic pace of life between the Museum, holidays and the new house in the Oxshott woods. No doubt Proctor would now be condemned as a workaholic, though that would be unfair. But he was certainly a fanatic, and it was a happy idea to air his manes.

In English of ten essays, with an introduction by Colin Lucas, that were originally published in the three-volume *Faire de l'histoire* (1974). They comprise François Puret on quantitative methods in history; Pierre Chaunu, "Economic History: Past achievements and future prospects"; Pierre Villard, "Constructing Marxist History"; Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie on the history of climate; André Burguière on demography; Alphonse Dupront on religion and religious anthropology; Georges Duby on ideologies in social history; Jacques Le Goff, "Mentalities: A history of ambiguities"; Mona Ozouf on the Festival in the French Revolution; and Roger Chartier and Daniel Roche, "New Approaches to the History of the Book".

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Talk about one time

Adam Mars-Jones

VIRGINIA HAMILTON
The People Could Fly
American Black Folktales
Illustrated by Leo and Diane Dillon
175pp. Walker. £9.95.
0744505240

The People Could Fly is a solidly entertaining collection of folktales in dialect, well illustrated and splendidly told; but it does not represent, as its teller Virginia Hamilton seems to think, a body of testimony about what it was like to be black and unfree in America. She includes in the book some slaves' wish-fulfillment fantasies and also a "reality tale", about rowing runaway slaves across the Ohio River; she pays tribute to its superior reality with a signed postscript, as if all the other words in the book were not hers as well.

If a story depends for its force on historical fact, it isn't a folktale. There is something rather too much like historical pain in a passage like this:

Sarah couldn't stand up straight any longer. She was too weak. The sun burned her face. The babe cried and cried, "Pity me, oh, pity me," say it sounded like. Sarah was so sad and starvin', she sat down in the row. "Get up, you black cow," called the Overseer. He pointed his hand, and the Driver's whip snarled round Sarah's legs. Her sack dress tore into rags. Her legs bled onto the earth. She couldn't get up.

In this story, "The People Could Fly", the boundaries of reality and fantasy remain sharply demarcated. In a true folktale, like "The Two Johns", the boundaries are fluid and pain is casual; someone killing your grandmother is only the middle term of an escalating series of trials you undergo, something that happens to you rather than to her.

A folktale betrays the times of its first telling or first popularity only in trace elements, like the magic spells of these stories, which are in a language that Hamilton presumes to be a gar-

bled African, but cannot reconstitute. It must be tempting to see in these stories the record of a particular painful history, but Hamilton does not make a convincing case. Slaves belonged to their masters very much as their cattle or horses did, and this leads her to detect identification on the teller's part with animals, which she describes as "highly unusual in the animal folklore genre". But anthropomorphism is such a basic mechanism



One of A. Ramchandran's illustrations to *Animal Fables of India*, a translation by Francis G. Hutchins of the ninth-century Sanskrit classic *Hitopadesha* (267pp. Amara Press/India Publications, 10 Parkfields, Putney, London SW15 6NH. £19.50. 0935100 03 2).

of folklore, from Aesop all the way down to Richard Adams, that this sounds very much like special pleading.

Hamilton scolds Joel Chandler Harris (whose *Uncle Remus*, 1880, gave many Americans their first exposure to black folktales) for not "reproducing exactly the tales or their language" and for using "phonetic dialect as a literary device". Unfortunately no transcriber of oral lore, Hamilton included, has any choice in the matter. Since the tales do not exist in a final form, no reproduction can be exact, and

the alternative to using dialect as a literary device is to abandon it.

Harris may have made too much of the quaintness of the tales he passed on, but Hamilton has a bias of her own: she chooses to see these stories as in some essential way exotic. This is understandable enough with some stories, where she has, so to speak, had to translate from Gullah English (originally Angola English); but she underplays any links between

her tales and, say, their English relations. She traces the bogeyman Raw Head and Bloody Bones, in the story "Little Eight John", back to a "slavery folk rhyme", but doesn't mention that Raw Head and Bloody Bones, who even puts in an appearance in *Ulysses*, has been used to frighten children since at least 1550.

Scholarship, then, is not Virginia Hamilton's strong point; but it hardly needs to be. Her tales get going with a splendid bland confidence. "Now, facts are facts", she will say, or "Let's talk about one time", or "Think a sea-

creator, Williamson makes a point of telling them precisely as he first heard them, without any embroidery of his own, and he prefaces each with an account of the original narrator. Speaking in a plain English, with a slight Highland inflection and a smattering of well-chosen Scots words, the voice remains very much that of an adult addressing a child. The majority are unambiguous parables, in which good and bad behaviour are duly rewarded or punished by one of the three eponymous spirits.

The diminutive fairy in its classic support is illustrated here in a rather sweetly Dickensian manner, features only in three of the punishing a vagrant for breaking a promise, punishing away a heaped crofter, and making a cradle to fill it with a fractious change.

More peculiar to West Coast legend is "Broonie" is a rather more piquant character: a blue-eyed Christ-figure, usually depicted as a wizened tramp, whose penny exposure to a kindness seems to be rewards for faith alone, as when he rescues a cow for a storm-blasted minister, but elsewhere he is meting out rough justice to the tight-fisted rich, and repaying the spontaneous generosity of the poor.

There is a saltier flavour and more exuberant ment in the five "Silkie" stories, where you adopt human shape for similar ends. In one, a fisherman who has been out fishing for seals for raiding his nets is terrorized in turn, as he suffers from their vengeance.

The message driven home here is that each family has to support, too, and are people entitled to harvest the sea.

The sentiment can be read as part of a general injunction, which George Moore once observed as a motif in Romantic folklore, to respect the harmonies of nature. Robinson already fond of older Hebridean versions of these tales, from Alexander Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica* or elsewhere, will probably miss the narrative intricacies and rich textures of the Gaelic; but the humour and simplicity here should appeal to many folklorists and children, who should be encouraged to applaud their conservation.

Like his first book, *Fireside Tales of the Traveller* (1983), this new selection seems to be just a fraction of a huge repertoire of tales which he inherited from his family of West Highland travelling folk, and the crofting and fishing communities they knew in their remoteness. A current of the tradition and not a

wave left this tell on the doorstep". The tales hover between laughter and fear. Wolf, "Wolf and Birds and the Fish-Horse" (a horse being a manatee) starts as a stooge, a villain, but ends up almost as a tragic hero when Aunt Fish-Horse takes her revenge on him.

Got him by the leg and pulled him into the water. Wolf's wife is crying at the sight. "Don't cry," Wolf tells her. "Aunt Fish-Horse just playing."

Aunt Fish-Horse dives to the bottom, stays a minute.

When Wolf is up again, his wife is still crying. "Don't cry like that while I'm still breathing," she tells his wife.

Aunt Fish-Horse dives again, stays down a day time. She comes up, Wolf is choking. His wife is crying, still.

"Better... had cry now..." Wolf chokes and sputters to his wife. "For... Fish-Horse is here."

Aunt Fish-Horse dived to the bottom with Wolf. A similar impressive balance is achieved by "The Peculiar Such Thing", which also captures dialect's affinity for vivid non-descripted. The details of the horror are delayed almost to the end of the story; M. R. James would surely have approved. The only comic element in the whole tale is the peculiar such thing's peculiar sing-song phrasing; but that is enough to satisfy the reader's shivers.

A man sees "something" creeping through the cracks of his log cabin. "That something the most peculiar such thing the fellow ever saw. And it had a great, big, long tail. The man cuts the tail off; cooks it and eats it. The night, the peculiar such thing comes scratching at the cabin, saying "Tallypo, tallypo, Give me back my tallypo." The man sends his dogs chase "what is was". They don't come back. The peculiar such thing says again, "Tallypo, tallypo. Give me back my tallypo." The man says, "I hasn't got it. I hasn't got your tallypo." And the peculiar such thing says, "Yes, you has!" And gets it back.

Paperbacks

Biography and memoirs

WILLIAM MAGAN. *Umma-More: The story of an Irish family*. 447pp. Element Books, Longmead, Shaftesbury, Dorset. SP7 8PL. £7.95. 0 906540 73 9. □ This is a formidable undertaking: a family history that goes back to the Ice Age, takes in the entire history of Ireland from that point on, and includes a fair amount of English history where pasts of the two countries converge. The Magan family, whose blood by now is predominantly Anglo-Irish, can trace its ancestry right back to some ancient kings of Connaught and princes of Moylurg; as a family, therefore, it has shown an interesting capacity to prosper in exceedingly dicey circumstances. It preferred adulteration to eradication – or perhaps adulteration didn't come into it. As William Magan points out, the Celts had no more right to call themselves "pure Irish" than the Viking, Norman, Old English or any other settlers who followed them.

They were all assimilated in time, even those who came with hostile intentions. Some were very hostile indeed: the bad behaviour of the Vikings, for example, is thoroughly deprecated by William Magan. "To contemplate the appalling losses resulting from their merciless savagery is indeed bitter", he says. Some time later, we find the pope, an Englishman, poking his nose into Ireland's affairs and making impudent remarks about the Irish: he called them "a rude and ignorant people" and advised Henry II to waste no time in bringing them under his yoke. William Magan, who is forthright and resolute in his way of viewing history, and also very astute, mentions a factor, often overlooked, in England's attitude to Ireland: the constant threat posed by one country (on account of its location) to the national security of the other.

The first actual ancestor the author can pin down is one Humphry Magan (born c 1590), who lived the life of a Celtic chieftain in a lowly house at Umma-More, right in the centre of Ireland. It was Humphry Magan's grandsons who took the prudent course, during the Williamite wars, of placing themselves on opposite sides in the conflict, so that one branch of the family at least could be certain of coming out on top. It is interesting to find an old Gaelic family acting expediently rather than heroically and casting off Catholicism with no ado. From the 1690s on, it is with the Protestant Magans that the story is concerned. Some judicious marriages got them into the Protestant settler Ascendancy class: the Anglo-Irish.

By the end of the nineteenth century the family had thrown up its quota of eccentrics, but things otherwise continued as normal, with the family engaging in its natural pursuits – tallypo and all that ballyhoo, fishing and other outdoor entertainments, such as wading purposefully in bogs. The book ends with a level-headed look at intransigence in the North and its causes. The author, throughout, goes in for a vigorous presentation of his plain facts. Whole-hearted, reactionary, bland – he can't, for example, resist inserting any apt quotation that comes into his mind, whether it's from Shakespeare or Thomas Moore – and knowledgeable, William Magan has produced a pungent account of his family's vicissitudes, in their historical setting.

History

STEVEN RUNCIMAN. *The Great Church in Constantinople: A study of the Patriarchate of Constantinople from the eve of the Turkish Conquest to the Greek War of Independence*. 455pp. Cambridge University Press. £9.95. 0521 313104. □ The Byzantines believed that their church could not exist without their emperor. After the Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453 they were proved wrong. Their material world had collapsed. Only their spirit survived, embodied in the Great Church of the patriarch. Sir Steven Runciman's celebrated study already fond of older Hebridean versions of these tales, from Alexander Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica* or elsewhere, will probably miss the narrative intricacies and rich textures of the Gaelic; but the humour and simplicity here should appeal to many folklorists and children, who should be encouraged to applaud their conservation.

original and important work should now be reproduced with all the misprints and minor mistakes of the 1968 edition (reviewed in the TLS of June 5, 1969); and at the very end of the story one is surprised still to read that the Patriarch Gregory V failed to denounce the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence. For the text of his encyclical anathematizing those who had rebelled against their lawful sovereign, the Ottoman Sultan, has long been known. It did not save his life, but it puts a different complexion on relations between the Great Church and its captors when its liberation seemed to be in sight.

Natural History

CHARLES HOSE. *The Field-Book of a Jungle-Wallah: Shore, river and forest life in Sarawak*. 216pp, with black-and-white plates and line drawings. Singapore: Oxford University Press. £4.95. 0 19 582635 3. □ This is a reprint of Charles Hose's last work, which appeared in the year of his death, 1929. (It was reviewed in the TLS of October 17 that year.) It is based on a series of expeditions which Hose made in the Baram river in Sarawak, and his subsequent visit to the area in 1920 when he was advising on the development of the Mirit oilfield. The high point of the book is Hose's description of his ascent of Mount Dulit (5,090 feet) in the Upper Baram. Unlike his earlier works (eg his two-volume *Pagan Tribes of Borneo*), *The Field-Book* was primarily intended for a popular audience, and, despite its fine descriptions of Bornean fauna and flora, it betrays many of the shortcomings of Hose's research – his penchant for self-advertisement (the number of birds and mammals which bear the epithet *hosei* is striking) and his hasty conclusions based on insufficient evidence (his assertion, for example, that the language used by the Punan camphor gatherers was a "special" tongue being neither "Punan, nor Kayan, nor Malay nor any other known language"). As Hose's friend, Arthur Keith, somewhat unwittingly pointed out, Hose approached the Bornean tribes "as one boy approaches another", and there is in his work "something of *Robinson Crusoe*, something of White's *Selborne*, [and] something of the romances of Walter Scott". All this makes for entertaining reading, but does little to allay suspicions about Hose's fundamental unreliability. Indeed, this handsomely reprinted work (which only lacks a scholarly introduction) serves well as an epitaph for one of the last of the great Victorian amateurs – an administrator turned researcher, who, in his own lifetime, enjoyed a quite undeserved scientific reputation amongst anthropologists and natural historians alike.

Travel

EVELYN WAUGH. *Ninety-Two Days*. 169pp. Penguin. £2.95. 0 14 009541 1. □ "One does not travel, any more than one falls in love, to collect material... for myself and many better than me, there is a fascination in distant and barbarous places, and particularly in the borderlands of conflicting cultures and states of development, where ideas, uprooted from their traditions, become oddly changed in translation." So Evelyn Waugh limbers up in the opening pages of this account of his journey, during the winter of 1932–33, to up-country British Guiana and a strip of Brazil. In glimpses of the eight years which Waugh spent restlessly moving about from one continent or country house to another, it is hard to avoid a sense that travel was little more than a distraction from himself, a kind of dignified fidget to dull the pain of humiliation and despair – not so much a search for new insights as an evasion of memories of his life up to the time of his first early marriage, betrayal and divorce. Certainly in this book the "fascination" flashes out only in short and not very memorable bursts; a calculated air of depression and jaded recall hangs over the deadpan narration – enlivened by brilliant sketches of jungle-mystics, missionaries, rogish natives and caricatured "colourful" ranchers – as it trudges from one trading-post or rest-house to the next, dutifully but intermittently noting the terrain, the flora and fauna, and obsessively recording insect-bites. The play of irony and hyperbole, the acute and economical sense of the absurd, the utterly unillusioned gloom, are all reserved for matters of diet, locomotion and personal discomfort – great dangers, considerable hardships and nightmarish difficulties (including some that suggest the germ of Tony Last's last destination in *A Handful of Dust*) are beautifully understated. The book is less a work of travel literature than the creation of a deeply engaging persona, a complex of asperities, scepticism and resourcefulness, Waugh-as-fairly-intrepid-traveller. Selections from *Ninety-Two Days*, first published in 1934 and reviewed in the TLS of March 15 that year, were later included in *When the Going Was Good*.

Theatre

DAVID MAGARSHAK. *Stanislavsky: A life*. 416pp. Faber. £5.95. 0 571 13791 1. KONSTANTIN STANISLAVSKY. *On the Art of the Stage*. Translated with an Introductory Essay on Stanislavsky's "System" by David Magarshak. 311pp. Faber. £5.95. 0 571 08172 X. □ Russian theatre, it seems, continues to inspire enormous interest in the West. Most of Stanislavsky's writings are now available in translation; there have been excellent studies of Meyerhold in English; Mayakovsky, Erdman, and Bulgakov are at last beginning to be staged in England, France and Germany, and the names of Evreinov, Tairov and Lyubimov are becoming more familiar. In the light of this, Faber's re-issue of Stanislavsky's *The Art of the Stage* in Magarshak's translation, prefaced by his long, informative and readable essay on the work, and of Magarshak's pioneering biography of Stanislavsky, both originally published in 1950 (and reviewed in the TLS of April 28, 1950 and March 2, 1951 respectively), are eminently sensible.

One of the first modern impresarios, Stanislavsky was also one of the first producer-actors, and along with Koneg, Meiningen and Gordon Craig, instrumental in forging the modern concept of the director as presiding genius. He was also the first to see acting as an art-form rather than a profession, and to insist (and put into practice) the concept of training for the actor. Perhaps most important of all, in retrospect, he was one of the first to democratize the theatre and to elaborate an "ethics of the stage" which fundamentally

changed theatrical practice. Apart from this, he founded the Moscow Arts Theatre and was responsible not only for championing the drama of Ibsen and Chekhov and pushing Naturalist Theatre to its ultimate limits, but later for introducing into the Russian repertoire the works of the Symbolists, notably of Maeterlinck, with whom he was on intimate terms, and of Blok.

The inventory of Stanislavsky's achievements is impressive, as indeed is the list of his connections. An acquaintance of Ostrovsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov and Gorky, he alone in the Russian theatre spans the period from Shchepkin to Bulgakov. Yet, although on the face of it he is good material for a biography, the result is oddly disappointing. The Stanislavsky of real life was not a particularly fascinating figure, nor is his temperament – narcissistic, obsessive, obstinate, and not especially perceptive – very attractive. Indeed in some senses the biography is a story of repeated failure elevated to myth; on a human level this is perhaps its most interesting aspect. Stanislavsky's progress from youthful, conceited ham to producer-actor, and finally to a kind of sage, was surprisingly painful. At every turn, and almost despite himself, Magarshak gives us not so much the great Stanislavsky, but a man confused and embarrassed by the dizzy course of events, a man desperately trying to keep abreast of the time and endlessly thwarted – whether it be by the débacle of Naturalism, his complete misunderstanding of both Shakespeare and Chekhov, his eclipse by Meyerhold, the uncomprehending, even hostile, reception of his "system", or, quite simply, the defeat of time. By the end of the story, Stanislavsky is almost running on the spot and seems only too pleased to retire from the fray into the world of "theory". His last words, "I am sure to get it all mixed up", might almost be an epitaph.

Travel

ROBERTSON, Ritchie. *Kafka: Judaism, politics and literature*. 269p. Routledge. £2.95. 0 710 009541 1. □ "One does not travel, any more than one falls in love, to collect material... for myself and many better than me, there is a fascination in distant and barbarous places, and particularly in the borderlands of conflicting cultures and states of development, where ideas, uprooted from their traditions, become oddly changed in translation." So Evelyn Waugh limbers up in the opening pages of this account of his journey, during the winter of 1932–33, to up-country British Guiana and a strip of Brazil. In glimpses of the eight years which Waugh spent restlessly moving about from one continent or country house to another, it is hard to avoid a sense that travel was little more than a distraction from himself, a kind of dignified fidget to dull the pain of humiliation and despair – not so much a search for new insights as an evasion of memories of his life up to the time of his first early marriage, betrayal and divorce. Certainly in this book the "fascination" flashes out only in short and not very memorable bursts; a calculated air of depression and jaded recall hangs over the deadpan narration – enlivened by brilliant sketches of jungle-mystics, missionaries, rogish natives and caricatured "colourful" ranchers – as it trudges from one trading-post or rest-house to the next, dutifully but intermittently noting the terrain, the flora and fauna, and obsessively recording insect-bites. The play of irony and hyperbole, the acute and economical sense of the absurd, the utterly unillusioned gloom, are all reserved for matters of diet, locomotion and personal discomfort – great dangers, considerable hardships and nightmarish difficulties (including some that suggest the germ of Tony Last's last destination in *A Handful of Dust*) are beautifully understated. The book is less a work of travel literature than the creation of a deeply engaging persona, a complex of asperities, scepticism and resourcefulness, Waugh-as-fairly-intrepid-traveller. Selections from *Ninety-Two Days*, first published in 1934 and reviewed in the TLS of March 15 that year, were later included in *When the Going Was Good*.

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The New York-based periodical *Antaeus* (of which Michael Hofmann reviewed Number 55 in the TLS, January 17) has a London office at 42A Hay's Mews, W1. Its international rates for four issues are \$32 (not \$20), for eight \$61 and for twelve \$93.

The 1985 Dylan Thomas Award (for poetry or short-story writing), administered by the Poetry Society, was awarded to Blake Morrison for a selection of ten poems, some of which had appeared in his collection *Dark Glasses* (reviewed in the TLS, November 16, 1984).

The panel of judges for the 1986 Sinclair Prize for Fiction, administered by the National Book League, (of £5,000, for a new book not only of literary merit but also of political or social significance in contemporary issues) are Fay Weldon, Jane Gardam, Maggie Gee, Lorna Sage and Hilary Spurling. Heinemann guarantee publication, with a minimum advance of £2,500, for the winning book.